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AMARILLY IN LOVE

BELLE K. MANIATES


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AMARILLY IN LOVE

By Belle K. Maniates

AMARILLY OF CLOTHES-LINE ALLEY

MILDEW MANSE

OUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBORS



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" Your little clump of wild stuff there looks like things tipped over in the ice-box." FRONTISPIECE. *See page 94.*

[illegible]VERLY IN LOVE

BY

[illegible] K. MANLATES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

[illegible]A. VAN DRESSER



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AMARILLY IN LOVE

BY

BELLE K. MANIATES

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

WILLIAM VAN DRESSER



BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1917

1161618

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Published, August, 1917

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Norwood Press
Set up and electrotyped by J. S. Cushing Co., Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

AUG 14 1917

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AMARILLY IN LOVE

CHAPTER I

"HALEBORO!"

The strident call of the brakeman roused James Courville from semi-slumber to a sense of his surroundings. He stepped from the train into the very heart of the taut little town which was devoid of straggling outskirts, the fields and woods creeping close to civilization. The business portion was confined to one straight broad street. The passers-by exchanged cheery, intimate greetings, and there was that general prevailing atmosphere of kindly interest that makes even a new-comer feel that he is not an alien.

A dog made friendly advances; a little lad halloaed in hospitable tone; a benignant old man, responding to the smiling salutation of a group of young girls, included him in the courtly sweep of his broad-brimmed hat; a

wee child tottering behind its mother held out wavering, inviting arms. Courville felt a sudden thrill as though borne into a tangible, human existence.

When he came to the hostelry of Haleboro, the landlord stood in the doorway with welcoming smile. Courville asked to be directed to a livery stable.

"Round on next street," was the reply, "but the rigs are all out to a funeral."

"Can I find some one with a private conveyance to take me where I want to go?"

"Depends upon which way you are going."

"Which sounds like the Cheshire Cat," reflected Courville, flashing a sudden, fleet smile that most agreeably lighted a plain and somewhat sombre countenance.

"Is there a road," he asked with the look of one who seems to be prying his memory, "called 'The Plains'?"

"That's the road south. The best thing for you to do is to go out with Jerry Pryne. He is the carrier of R.F.D. Number Six."

"Does Uncle Sam allow the carriers to take passengers?"

"Not as a general thing, but Jerry furnishes his own rig, so he can be independent. He

won't drive any one else's horse. Better hurry along. Post-office is in next block."

At the post-office Courville easily picked the carrier of route Number Six from the men carrying out mail sacks. A slow-moving man with meditative grey eyes seemed to tally with his conception of a man who "wouldn't drive any one else's horse."

Courville introduced himself and asked permission to ride out on "The Plains." The carrier expressed himself as being glad of company and they started out on the mail route.

"I am told," remarked Courville casually, "that a place known as The House at the Corners lies on the Plains."

He was conscious of a swift, side glance from the carrier.

"Yes; it is not far from the end of my route."

The main street of Haleboro had now become the country road and Courville was greatly entertained by the mailing procedure. In front of each letter box, which served the dual purpose of post-office and door-plate, the experienced horse stopped of his own volition while Jerry gathered up the mail.

Seldom were the letters stamped. A couple of pennies wrapped in a piece of paper generally accompanied the missive. Frequently there was a note to the carrier containing a memorandum of commissions for the accommodating man to execute in town, though when possible the members of the household came down to "give and take" in person.

From everyone they passed on the road came a hearty greeting followed by comment on crops and weather.

"It must be nice," thought the man of cities, "to meet so many people who know you and seem really glad to see you."

"I will be on your route before long, I trust," he said, aloud.

"Are you the Man at the Corners?"

"Is that the name I am known by?" asked Courville, amused.

"We knew no other name for you. Your place is nearly at the end of my route, and the last farm is the Jenkins place."

"My nearest neighbors?"

"Yes; they came from the city three years ago. Hardworking folks — have to be, with so many mouths to feed."

"Children?"

"A few. I take it you don't care for children," commented Jerry, noting the tone of dismay.

Courville winced.

"My only child, a little boy, died four years ago," he said briefly.

Jerry's eyes softened.

"The Jenkinses have made your place their playground. You'll have hard work to keep them out."

"How many are there?"

"You count while I run them off. There's Flamingus, aged seventeen; Gus, sixteen; Milton, fifteen; Bobby, fourteen; Bud, thirteen; Cory, twelve; Iry, seven —"

"Don't go any farther!" cried Courville in consternation.

"There's one more, but not a Jenkins. A man and his wife live there with the family. They have a little girl. I don't know their names, as they never get any mail. The Jenkinses call the man, The Boarder; and his wife, Lily Rose. When are you calculating to move on to your place?"

"Soon. I've run down to be introduced to it."

"Did you buy it without seeing it!" gasped the practical son of the soil.

"Yes; I had the fancy to live in the country, and a friend of mine discovered The Corners and bought it for me."

"There it is — on your right."

Courville turned quickly.

Set well back in the midst of an emerald park of wide-spreading elms, stood an abandoned farmhouse whose outfields had long lain fallow. It was known as The House at the Corners because, according to the prevailing system of survey, there should have been a road where the house was situated, and a road would have meant a corner.

He gave a little cry punctuated with an exclamation point of pleasure.

"How beautiful!"

Jerry's appraising glance was disparaging. He saw only a dilapidated farmhouse inclosed by a wilderness of everything that grows, from rhododendrons to dandelions.

"Have to do a lot to the soil. But how are you going to get back to town? I don't return this way."

"I won't mind the walk," Courville assured

him. "I'll see you again soon. Thank you for bringing me out."

He walked up a little zig-zag path. There was no geometrical preciseness about the grounds. Delightful, meandering ways led in every direction to picturesque spots. Here, a rolling rise of greensward; there, a wagging, willowish brook, its surface lightly ruffled by a frisky little sprite of a breeze; beyond, a group of second growth trees, young and slender, but so close together that they formed a thicket through which wandered endless, winding paths; then, a little lily pond, and last and loveliest of all were the marshes stretching to the riotous river, their bogs a pale green with the virgin freshness of the year.

"It's just as Beverly pictured it," he thought, as he stooped and looked about him through the amplitude of mauve space. "I'll take his word for the gloom of the old desolate house, and go back to town."

He had walked about half a mile down the road when he was overtaken by a little girl, who was driving a piebald horse attached to a rickety buggy.

"Goin' fur?"

"To Haleboro."

"Get in. I'm a goin' to the first store at the town limits. Can't go no further 'cause Doxology cuts up in town. Be keerful! Don't step in the butter'n things."

Courville stepped gingerly into the buggy, and found himself snugly wedged in by the molasses jug, kerosene can, butter and egg crocks.

"My name's Cory Jenkins," cordially announced the little girl, looking at him approvingly with button-bright eyes.

"And you are twelve years old," he said, after an instant's reflection.

"Why, how did you know!"

"I'm a good guesser."

"So be I. You're the Man at the Corners."

"Jerry Pryne told you."

"Oh — he told you, too!"

"Discovered!"

"I'm glad you've got here at last. You'd got to be a joke."

"A joke! I like that!"

"Well! you see 'twas so long ago you bought the Corners, and you didn't never show up nor nothing. The Boarder said you was like good luck — always being looked

for and never comin', and whenever anybody puts anything off, we say: 'You're worse than the Man at the Corners.'"

"I see that it is indeed high time I arrived."

"Hev you come to stay?"

"Not yet; I'm going to send a whole army of men down here to-morrow to make over the house and fix up the place."

"You ain't goin' to put any 'keep the grass off' signs up, are you?" she asked anxiously.

"No; the whole place will be open to you."

"We've come to feel like it was our'n. Me and Iry and Ceely play there. That thicket's swell for hide-and-seek. Flam takes his girl down there to spark. Milt and Gus fish in the river. Lily Rose goes down to read when she has time and sets on your porch. The Boarder hunts in your woods. I hope you ain't in no hurry. You could beat Doxy walking."

She gave the ample back of the horse an encouraging slap with the reins which, however, awakened no incentive to speed.

"Hustle up, Dox! You know there ain't no hearse back of you. We bought him from a minister," she explained, "and he led

so many funyrals that Dox got the gait all right. The Boarder saws him up a lot afore he gets into town. He says he's ashamed to go in like he was slow freight. The Boarder uster to be a brakeman. But be you in a hurry?"

"Not the slightest," assured Courville. "I like to jog along through this beautiful country."

"'Tis nice. 'Twould seem nicer to you if you'd ever lived in an alley."

"In an alley!"

"Like we did. Seein' you're a goin' to be our nearest neighbor, you might as well know all about us and then you won't be a wonderin' about us or feel strange-like as we done when we first come. My pa died when Iry, my little brother, wa'nt more'n three months old and Ma took in washin's. We lived in a little tumbledown house in Clothes-line Alley, and as fast as we got old enough, we all went to work. Amarilly's the oldest."

"That's one Jerry forgot to count."

"She's away to college. Jerry never seen her, but there don't anyone want to leave Amarilly out, 'cause she's the prize package

of the Jenkinses. When she was old enough to work, she helped clean at a theater. Flamingus (Flam and Flammy for short) was a telegraph boy. Gus milked the grocer's cow. Bobby and Bud sold papers, or Bud did, till he found his voice would bring in. I wiped dishes at a boarding-house. We had hard sleddin' and then our fortunes come all to once. First we got the Boarder. We didn't have room nor dishes enough for ourselves, but Amarilly thought out a way of having double-decker. Half of us set to the table and the rest stood behind those settin' and took what was handed them. Then Amarilly got Ma some swell washings. She went to a guild school, and the young lady who taught her brought us her washin's and got us all the surpluses from the choir at St. Mark's to do. Her name was Colette King then, but the minister to St. Mark's, Mr. Meredith — we always called him Mr. St. John 'cause we got his names mixed up with saints — married her. Sure you ain't in no hurry?"

"Quite sure. Are you?"

"No; that's why I think it's time to eat."

She dove down into a basket and brought forth a lunch box.

"How did you know I was hungry?"

"Ain't you always hungry? I am. Here's some crullers and sandwiches and apples. Now, I'll keep on about us."

"Maybe," expostulated Courville, "your mother wouldn't like you to repeat your family affairs."

"Yes, she would. She always says, 'Tell all you know about yourself first, afore folks has time to make up things about you.' Well, as I said, luck had struck us and we was gettin' along fine when we all come down with scarlit fever and Mr. St. John and Miss King was away for the summer. When we got well, we found we'd all lost our jobs, except the Boarder. The day they took the quarrytine off, Amarilly took back Mr. St. John's surplus what he preaches in, and his housekeeper said fer to keep it. Then she took home Miss King's lace waist and her housekeeper said to keep that. Lucky they did, cause the surplus kept us from starving and Lily Rose got married in the lace waist.

"We didn't know what to do till Amarilly

thought of rentin' out the surplus and that surplus went some. Amarilly had to keep books for it. She rented it to a man to sing in at a concert, to a fake weddin' in a window, onct to a corpse 'cause he didn't have stylish clothes, to the Boarder to git his likeness took to give Lily Rose, to a negro minister, a maskyrade and onct it got stole and most pawned, but best of all to Mr. Derry Phillips, an artist, who painted it on a man, and that was the makin' of Amarilly.

"You see he hired her to red up his studio and she cooked his meals, and he taught her to talk stylish like the teacher says I must, only I can't remember. Mr. Derry uster love to come to our house and play with us kids. He got a swell teacher for Amarilly and she learnt lots. She got us to be a snydikit, only I don't say it right, and we took our savings and bought the alley house. Then we sold it and bought our farm. Amarilly felt bad to live in the country, so Mr. Derry sent her to a swell college where it costs heaps to go and she has grand clothes. Mrs. St. John picks them out. Mr. Derry has been in Paris three years. Amarilly's goin' to graduate a year from June. That's

all about her except that when the Boarder married Lily Rose, Amarilly lent her the lace waist and they found a note in the sleeve which should have been in the surplus and it straightened out a lovers' quarrel so Mr. St. John and Miss King could get married.

"Flamingus is next. He's kind of bossy. Milt is a good worker, but awful stingy. Gus is a peach. He built a cowhouse in the alley and a cow got off a train and walked right into it — the cowhouse, I mean, so Ma named her Cowslip and she started Gus in the dairy business. Bobby's a lot of fun and he learns quick like Amarilly. Bud's grand. He sings beautiful, or did, and a bishop found it out and he made good money singing in the choir. His voice is changing and it's awful croaky. There's nothing to tell about me except that I eat a lot, but Ma says it's because I'm growin' fast. Ma makes excuses for everyone. I talk a lot, but so did Amarilly, and after she went away I had to talk for both of us."

Courville had perceived early in the recital of the annals of his nearest neighbors that he might as well try to check Niagara as to

halt Cory until she had got their "story" out of her system.

"You have a good memory," he commented.

"Oh, Lily Rose has told it to me over and over. Lily Rose loves stories and she loves Amarilly and she's dyin' to know what's goin' to happen to her. She says it's as excitin' as continued stories, only you have to wait so long."

"I wonder, too," thought Courville, "what effect four years of college environment will have on Cory's sister. I fear the young artist wasn't wise, unless — he intends to marry her."

"I wish," sighed Cory, "that I could have a story, too."

"You can have. Let me see, when I build the house and move down, you can help me 'settle.' Then we'll have tea parties and picnics."

"That will be grand! Have you a large family?"

"None at all. I am alone in the world save for a housekeeper who housekeeps too clean for comfort."

"I should think a tidy house, real tidy,

would be lonesome. But here we are, to the store where we trade."

"I see there's a soda fountain next door. We'll go in and sample their goods."

"My! I'm glad you are goin' to be our neighbor!"

"So am I. But don't you have to tie Doxology?"

"Standing is his long suit. He's too lazy to even kick the flies off."

CHAPTER II

THE little white calf was of constitution so delicate that she needed much coaxing before she would respond to Lily Rose's determined efforts to prolong her existence. She did not take kindly to her fodder, but turned her head mournfully and persistently away from her rations. Day by day she continued to pine until Lily Rose bade the boys fence off a little patch of the orchard and build a pen therein. Here the little white calf was installed, fed upon warm milk and coddled until she became a sturdy, agile and sportive thing of veal.

One day Flamingus came briskly into the kitchen.

"Jed Chalker is out here, and he wants to buy Surplus," he announced generally, though with eyes turned in the direction of Lily Rose.

Lily Rose looked off upon fields of stirring green, fertile in their promise of upcoming things. The fate of Surplus wavered for a moment.

"'Tain't in natur for calves to stay calves," remarked the Boarder casually. "She'd hev to go some time, and Jed's got a good barn."

Thus encouraged, Lily Rose gave her consent to the sale, but when Jed Chalker drove up to the orchard with a penned wagon, and the Jenkins men-folks assembled to lend a helping hand, she went around the house that she might not witness the passing of the little white calf.

"Why, Lily Rose!" expostulated Mrs. Jenkins, "I do believe you are cryin'!"

"I can't help it. I've fed her and took care of her ever sence she was born. When there wa'nt none of you around, I've been out and curried her so she would look nice. It's most like sellin' Ceely."

"Lily Rose, how you talk! If you feel that way about it, I'll jest go and call the old sale off."

"No," declared Lily Rose firmly, "I've got to learn to be commonsensible, as Amarilly says, if I'm a goin' to be a good farm wife."

"One does git to thinkin' a hull lot of dumb critters. It used to go agin me to eat the hens I had helped to grow up from chicks, but I am gittin' hen-hardened now."

With this reflection Mrs. Jenkins passed on around the house. In a moment she returned.

"That Surplus is orful contrary. She's jest bound she won't go in the wagon."

"She's got some of her ma's old sportin' Texas spirit croppin' out," said Bobby, coming up to them. "They want a pail of milk, ma, to coax her into the wagon."

Mrs. Jenkins procured the desired bait and then went with Bobby to the scene of action. She came back to make report.

"It was Gus what thought of that milk business," she said proudly. "He's in the wagon now a-holdin' out the pail."

Another round trip brought the information:

"She's in, and they're off!"

Lily Rose had listened to these bulletins with a lively interest, despite her unwillingness to be an eye witness to the transaction. Flamingus now appeared on the scene.

"Here, Lily Rose," he said, handing her twelve dollars, for by common consent the calf money was always her share of the profits.

"I've got twelve dollars yet from the last one," she remarked proudly.

"What you savin' up for?" asked Milton facetiously. "Goin' to buy a piano or send Ceely to college?"

"I'll tell you the next time we sit at table."

The family followed the custom set by Amarilly of imparting information only when they were assembled *en masse.*

"Saves time and breath," she had declared.

Cory stole surreptitiously into the dining room and set the clock ahead. Mrs. Jenkins whipped up a "hit and miss" dinner, to which all hands responded with alacrity.

"Out with it, Lily Rose," said the Boarder, poising his spoon above the stew. "It must be something ornamental 'stead of useful, you've kep' so still about it."

"It's both," she replied. "I am goin' to put in a telerphone."

After making this electrifying announcement, Lily Rose looked positively reckless and wholly defiant of the consequences of such a rash proposition.

In his heart of hearts each and every Jenkins, as well as the Boarder, had long desired to be connected with the neighborhood in this wonderful way, but each had feared to be the one to make such deviation from

the economic, plodding path of thrift they had marked out, so they were glad to throw the responsibility of such indulgence on to Lily Rose's slender shoulders.

"You're sure goin' to blow yourself," said Flamingus, after the first shock of surprise and delight had passed. "I'll go and see Solomon Saunders about layin' the wires right after dinner."

"I wanted to spend it for something," explained Lily Rose, "that all of us could enjoy and use. Flammy can talk to Almy between times when he ain't settin' up with her. Gus needs it in his business, and," she said with an appealing look at her husband, "you know when you go to town, you'll like to call up and hear me and little Ceely talk."

"You bet you, I will!" he declared.

"'Twill keep us from gittin' sick," prophesied Mrs. Jenkins, "to know we kin halloa to a doctor handy like."

"Most of all," further explained Lily Rose, "I want it for Amarilly, so when she's home this summer, she won't feel as if she was a mile past the jumpin'-off place, like she allers seems to when she's here."

"Yes," ruminated Mrs. Jenkins aloud, "Amarilly acts like she was skeert of the country."

"No more to hum here than a fish would be in a hot-house," declared the Boarder, "but mebby the telerphone will help out some."

"You make me tired! Always Amarilly!" growled Milton. "Nuthin's ever done or bought around this place without it's goin' to be pie for Amarilly. We'll hev to be buyin' an auto for her next thing, I suppose."

"Now listen here!" cried Gus hotly. "It's the way it's always going to be, too. Where'd we be, I'd like to know, if it hadn't been for Amarilly? Back in Clothes-line Alley with Ma taking in washings and us boys doin' odd jobs. Gee! I'd like to buy her an auto and everything else she ought to have."

"Here, too!" chimed in Bud and Bobby.

"Oh, fade away, Milt!" advised Flamingus.

Under the avalanche of disapproval hurled at him, Milton faded.

"I'm jest a leetle mite anxious about Amarilly's comin' this time," said Mrs. Jenkins to Lily Rose when they were washing the dishes, the task that above all others

seems to beget confidence between the co-workers. "You see she's made us such snap-shot visits before, but now she won't hev no goin' back to school to look forwards to. She'll be here to stay till she knows what she's a-goin' to do, and it's likely to be dull for her."

"Don't you worry. Leave it to Amarilly to make herself to hum and find the best in any old place she hits," said Lily Rose confidently. "She'll keep us from saggin', too."

"It don't seem possible that her four years to school is up," continued Mrs. Jenkins reminiscently. "We've saw so little of her. She'd jest got nicely settled here in her first long vacation when that Ogilvie gal's ma wrote for her to go to the mountains with her folks and learn her dull gal some algebray, so she wouldn't be to the foot of her class. Then the next year she jest stopped off a week each way goin' to that ranch with her chum Brendy. And last summer she took that crazy idee to stay in town and take a typewritin' and business course. As if she'd ever use it! — with all her grand learnin'."

"Amarilly'll use everything she learns," said Lily Rose.

"She don't seem to know yet what she's a-goin' to do. She knows so much, I suppose it'll be hard fer her to tell what to choose."

"I wish," began Lily Rose wistfully, "that she would —"

She was interrupted in the utterance of her best wishes for Amarilly by the sound of wagon wheels and a stentorian "Whoa, there!"

"Oh!" she cried wildly, throwing the dish towel into space, "here's Sol already come to lay the wires."

The all-absorbing topic of thought and conversation at the farm for the next few days was Lily Rose's telephone. What form of instrument to have and where it should hang were weighty problems. The terms "receiver", "transmitter", and "extension" were used ostentatiously and familiarly. When the amazing innovation was at last installed and they were bidden to "try it out", they made connections with awed countenances and muffled voices.

"Why, I can hear every word jest as plain

as if Almy was right in the room," gasped Lily Rose, who of course had the first innings. "Here, Flammy, you talk to her afore she gets off the line."

When they had all made the test, they felt that hereafter life without a telephone would not be worth living.

The simplicity of the system in use by the People's Line would seem blissful to the patrons of city telephones. There was no antagonistic Central to hurl those exasperating admonitions of "Line busy" and "Louder, please." The mode of procedure was unpretentious but effective. The telephone register was a sheet of paper on which were inscribed the calls: "One long, Whittleseys"; "One long, two short, Joneses"; "one short, two long, and a short, Chalkers"; and so on in telegraphic form.

Every signal brought the Jenkins family to the list to learn who might be holding converse. At the first sharp ring, they suspended work and in breathless excitement counted the rings. When the welcome "five longs" had ceased, they all made for the sitting-room and the first one to reach the goal was the lucky listener.

The male portion of the household couldn't seem to regard the telephone otherwise than in the light of a diversion, until one morning the Boarder announced his intention of going to the Whittlesey farm, which was two miles distant.

"I shall hev to hoof it," he remarked, "because the boys are working the team and the mare has gone lame."

"What are you going for?" asked Lily Rose.

"This is one of the days Whittlesey goes to town, and I want him to buy me some barbed wire."

"Why in the world don't you phone him to get it?" asked Lily Rose.

"Well, I never! Why in Sam Hill couldn't I hev thought of that!" he wondered.

That same day Mrs. Jenkins came out in the summer kitchen where Lily Rose was working the churn.

"Lily Rose, the clock has stopped! First time since we owned it. I won't know what time to put dinner over."

"Call up any of the neighbors on the phone and ask them what time it is," advised Lily Rose.

"Well, it does beat all, Lily Rose, how handy you are to think of things."

"Lily Rose uses her head," said Bobby approvingly.

Mrs. Jenkins allowed that this was so, and thereafter tried to do likewise. She made the discovery that she could quietly take down the receiver and listen to the conversations on the line. Thereupon life became for her one fascinating round of intense excitement. If she were in the kitchen preparing supper, or at the trough feeding the hogs, the sound of the bell would be the signal for her frantic rush to the telephone. Sometimes it was a lengthy discussion that she came in on, and before it was finished the family would surround her, awaiting with eager curiosity for her "heard on the line" information. Often the things she caught were of such interest that she issued bulletins in a stage-whispered aside before the conversation was finished.

The Jenkins farm was on a cross-road and rather remote from neighbors. They only went to town when necessity demanded and they did not have time to mingle in the social life of the district, so they remained in bliss-

ful though unprofitable ignorance of much that took place. By telephonic means Mrs. Jenkins now found herself quite in touch with neighborhood round robins.

One evening there seemed to be an unusual amount of telephoning and Mrs. Jenkins was "right there with both ears", as Bobby expressed it.

"I've lost my thimble," she said, as she was preparing to go upstairs for the night.

"Well, Ma," said Flamingus grimly, "I guess it's the only thing you *have* lost this evening."

"Can you do that?" Jerry Pryne had gravely asked when he came in one day and saw Mrs. Jenkins listening at the telephone.

"You see me doin' it, don't you?"

"I mean, have you the right to do it?"

"Same right as you have to read a postal card," she retorted, and Jerry was silenced though not convinced.

"That phone's goin' to be the spilin' of Ma," Milton complained to the Boarder. "She's getting so gossipy and full of the neighbors' consarns, she lets go of everything to spell out that phone talk. She gets 'em going and coming."

"Oh, well," defended the Boarder, "she'll git tired of it after the newness wears off. It's the way with everything. I'm glad if yer ma's gittin' pleasure outen it. She has had mighty few pleasures and thar's no next door talk for her like thar was back in the alley."

But Mrs. Jenkins was getting something out of the telephone besides pleasure. She was learning to see herself and hers as others saw them — getting a line on their market value. There were many things she heard in her phoning hours that she did not repeat. The gist of the neighborhood appraisal boiled down was, that the "Jenkinses were good-hearted, clever folks, but awful simple; hard-working, but slow to catch on."

"Lily Rose," she said suddenly one day as she quietly put up the receiver, "sometimes I guess mebby it pays to see what's goin' on in places besides hum. We all work so hard we don't git time to go to town, or read the papers, or mix in the country doin's. Mebby if we hed, we'd hev got along further in these four years."

"Got along further!" echoed Lily Rose. "Why I think we've done wonders."

"I dunno," said Mrs. Jenkins doubtfully.

Lily Rose began an inventory of their prosperity.

"Place paid for. Flam goin' to marry the smartest gal in the county in a year or two, and her pa to start them off with a forty, and cattle, and hogs. Gus with a good milk route, and the others all to school."

"I know," said Mrs. Jenkins, "but the place can't make no more than it's a-doin' now, and there's Bud's voice not bringin' in anything, cause it's changin'; and he'll hev to study when it does git changed. Bobby sot on goin' to college. Iry, Co and Ceely to eddicate and us a-growin' older."

"We're a-doin' the best we can," said Lily Rose hopefully, "and mebby a ten-strike'll come along. Anyway, I guess it's better to git rich slow than to git poor fast."

"Ten-strikes don't come. You've got to git out after them. I hope Amarilly won't be ditched afore she gits here this time. She'll ketch on as slick as silk. Amarilly was always the go-getter one of the family."

"Ketch on to what?" asked Lily Rose.

"Oh, things," replied Mrs. Jenkins vaguely and yet mysteriously.

CHAPTER III

PARIS sulked under sodden skies. There had been many days of sluggish, persistent rain, and the succeeding wraith-like vapor was now slowly changing into a dense fog.

Derry Phillips, coming from his bedroom into the studio, looked disconsolately out of the window. The buildings showed vaguely and deceptively through the mist like spectral sentinels, and, remembering what a June day at home would be, he felt the little tug that sometimes strains at the home-strings of even the self-exiled.

He turned dismally from his opaque outlook and instantly his depression lifted, for on the table he saw two letters, American postmarked. One was in an envelope of the hue he had sought so vainly in the sky; the other matched the weather. He decided to read the latter first.

"It will be a curtain-raiser to Amarilly's," he thought, as he broke the seal across Colette Meredith's return address:

"Dear Mr. Phillips:

"At last I am going to comply with your request to give you a detailed description of Snydikit Farm (I never could get away from Co's name for it) and its many inmates.

"Recently I accepted an invitation to spend a couple of days there. It may sound trite to say I arrived there safely, but had you seen me in the act of arriving, you would recognize the importance of the information.

"When I stepped from the train at Haleboro, the little village nearest the farm, there were drawn up in waiting a big, yellow bus and a rickety top buggy attached to a mild-eyed animal, a sort of cartoon of a horse which hadn't entirely dispensed with his winter clothes, for his brown hide was visible in spots. I had a fleeting, blurred vision of the Boarder behind the dashboard. I said the top buggy was drawn up. I was in error. It was dashing round in circles. I ran alongside and became a tangent to the concentrics, endeavoring to throw in my bag. I muffed it in the first round, but made good in the fifth. I then returned to the train for my suitcase which was packed with various things for Mrs. Jenkins and the children. It was in the act of being dumped and was the sole piece of luggage for this stop.

"I claimed it then and there, in spite of the

objections of the baggage master, who doubtless wanted to improve this rare opportunity for checking and releasing. I asked one of the idle bystanders to lend a hand with the heavy suitcase and we conveyed it to the carryall, which was still revolving on its axis, or axles. We shot it deftly in the back (of the buggy, I mean), and I then achieved entrée, right side up, at the Boarder's left. We ceased to be a merry-go-round and went forward. The train halted fully two minutes over the scheduled time to allow the interested passengers to view this local act.

"We dashed across the village bridge faster, I am sure, than the legal limit which, so a sign read, was to be gauged by the pace of one 'A Walk,' whoever he may be, and tore up the main and only street of the village, everyone shying out of our Mazeppa-like way. The Boarder sawed at the reins and jerked the horse from left to right as if he were switching trains.

"Once outside the limits, the cyclonic animal came down to the funereal pace expressed by his name, Doxology, and had to be prodded all the rest of the way.

"When we had cleared the bridge, conversation was possible, and the Boarder told me that Doxology always acted in this fashion. Either the rare event of his 'coming to town' in this style is his equine idea of a 'time', or else, as I strongly

suspect, the Boarder is desirous of convincing the guileless townspeople that he owns a trotter, and so works him up to town speed.

"We devoted our time to reminiscences and then we came up to the present and delved into the future of the Jenkinses *et al.*

"When we left the main highway, we turned into a cross-road that seemed to take us away from the haunts of man. But this cross-road proved a Broadway compared to the lane into which we finally turned and which he informed me was 'our road.' He designated it also as a cross-road, but it didn't seem to cross anything or lead anywhere. It was quite evident that no one had ever heretofore attempted to cross it, for there were no wheel tracks in the tall grass that were visible to the unmagnified eye.

"This mode of transit was new to me, for on former visits I had motored out via the interurban route.

"Snydikit is a tidy little farm with nothing lying around loose. I suppose naturally the Boarder's mechanical instinct would keep things from getting hingeless. The transplanting of the Jenkins family back to the soil has worked advantageously, simply changing the activity of alleys for the bravado of barns. But there are some plants, you know, that are too deeply rooted to endure transplanting, and I see plainly that our

Amarilly will never flourish in the green pastures to which she is returning next week.

"As to the family: Mrs. Jenkins is — just Mrs. Jenkins. Flamingus is ameliorating under the love of 'Almy', a sensible girl who teaches in District No. 15 and is endeavoring to transpose the verbs of her suitor's vernacular. Milton is as unchangeable as — vinegar, and the love of lucre predominates, but he is honest — super-honest. Gus clings to cows and the dairy business. I suggested to him that he open an ice-cream place in the village, and he has quite frozen to the idea. Bobby is becoming studious and is inclined to have college aspirations. Poor Bud is in the transition state as to voice, but is patiently awaiting developments. Cory as of old is a bon vivant. Iry! Well, Iry has outclassed Achilles, for his vulnerable spot hasn't been located as yet. He has fallen in the river five times, — once he beat the proverbial stunt of coming to the surface and out by four uprisings — has taken a header in the soft soap barrel twice, chased by a festive bull ditto, caught in an agricultural implement thrice, fallen in the cistern countless times, and — well, the only thing he hasn't fallen into is the bee-hive. Still he liveth and lispeth. The Boarder is a tower of strength and practicality. Lily Rose is as sweet as ever and has acquired an obsession for light literature induced and fostered by a box of

books left in Snydikit-attic by the former occupants. Little Lucelia, so named after the Boarder's mother, but shortened to 'Ceely' for everyday use, you've never seen, which makes me realize how time has flown.

"They don't 'neighbor' except with Almy's family and with a very mysterious person whom I have never met. He is commonly referred to as the 'Man at the Corners', though his name is James Courville. He came here a stranger about a year ago, bought an abandoned farm called the 'Corners', because it is at a point where there should be corners. He has transformed it into a beautiful fancy farm and lives there alone with his help. He is an oracle to the neighborhood, and Cory is a devotee at his shrine. Lily Rose thinks he has been 'crossed.' Everything in their vicinity seems to be 'crossed' one way or another.

"When are you going to return that flying visit John and I made you in Paris? He will never again, I fear, be able to take a vacation long enough for a repetition of the visit.

"Most cordially yours,
"Colette Meredith."

Derry's eyes danced with glee throughout the reading of this letter. Then he opened expectantly the blue-tinted envelope which bore a later date than the one from Colette.

"— Miles from Anywhere.
"June — th.
"Have lost all sense of time and place.

"Dear Mr. Derry:

"At last I am one of the 'also graduated.' I am afraid you will think I made a rather poor showing at the finish, but teachers are terribly inquisitive, and they weren't a bit shy about asking questions. They might have been more economical and saved some of them for next year. I was surprised and pleased to learn that I really squeezed through everything.

"When I wrote to you in my first year of my aspirations, you advised me to 'ease off and not turn out a blue stocking.' You see how needless was your alarm.

"My intentions were honorable and I studied very hard. Some days I really made almost brilliant recitations, and then on other days I'd fail outrageously on some simple subject. After one of these failures, a frigid-featured teacher looked at me for a miserable minute and then said in cutting tone: 'You know so much, Miss Jenkins, one wonders, you don't know more'! Somehow I instinctively feel that her word-picture is correct — as to the last part, I mean. Maybe it is because I wasn't to the college born and didn't get the book-worm habit early in life.

"There was one Amazon of a girl that we all envied. If there had been anything higher than their highest rating, she would have been it. We called her 'one hundred plus.' Brenda, my ranch-girl friend, said that the Amazon might have brains, but that she and I could console ourselves by remembering that we had wits. I told her wits might win once in a while, but when you have to sharpen them so often, they get whittled to pieces.

"When I arrived here, they were all in the door-yard, and, well — they looked good to me, but oh, Mr. Derry, I couldn't help wishing for a single selfish moment that they were all lined up in little old Poverty Flat, alias Clothes-line Alley! It was the time when dusk dims into dark. There were cow-bells and other doleful sounds, but they were soon drowned in my sea of welcomes, led by Ma. (How that word scandalized some of the girls at college! But it seems to belong to her and no other substitute will do.)

"I talked even myself tired during the supper-time and early evening and then I went up to my room — the best room in the house — that they had fitted up for me. It is a gabled room with swing-out windows to the east and to the west, so if the spirit moves me, I can look on the sun rising or setting, with breezes across lots. Lily Rose had put beautifully laundered curtains to

these windows and the Boarder had built in shelves for my books. Each one of the family contributed his and her mite, and you know what a little bit added to a little bit more will do. I'd love the house if it were set anywhere but in the midst of this awful stillness. It would have been lonesome at college but for the sweet, if subdued, sounds of revelry by night — the call to arms after lights were out, the sputtering of alcoholic flames from chafing-dish, and the alarm signals from sentries.

"You have never lived in the country, Mr. Derry, and so you cannot know what awfulness there is in the weird shriek of something about the midnight hour that they say is the call of the wild loon. I think it is the lost soul of a murderer. Some other nameless creature told its troubles in tragic tone, and a mourning dove sympathized, and all the poplars shivered in chorus.

"Before the break of day, earlier even than the hour at which I used to rise to come to 'red up' your studio, I heard the family astir. Up the flue came the voices of my mother, brothers, sister, the Boarder, and Lily Rose talking me over.

"I listened.

"Lily Rose was saying emphatically: 'I told you, Milt, she wouldn't be stuck up and that we wouldn't have to make company of her.'

"'She is folksy, jest the way she uster be,' was the Boarder's comment.

"'She's jest our Amarilly,' said Ma.

"That was a good enough verdict for me. I went to sleep again and was awakened by a terrible din of farmyard talk; cackles, crows, gobbles, quacks, and a funny, little three-note scale which is rendered by young turkeys. There was one particular rooster that seemed to have something terrible on his mind. These were maddening sounds, but later came that lonesome one — the twitter of dawn birds. You told me you had heard it coming home, but I believe it sounds different when you are awakened by it."

"Second day after.

"I am once more one of the family. They were all just a bit stand-offish with me at first and we sat down to meals in state in the sitting-room (there is no dining-room) with a white cloth covering the table. But to-day I insisted on recognition and we gathered comfortably and normally around the kitchen table, which was adorned with a gay, red cloth, handy to the hot cakes served direct from cook-stove to consumer. I like this style for family use and it makes me feel in the fold.

"The gratitude and appreciation for all you've done for me, Mr. Derry, is in me, but I don't

know the right words for it to come out in. You say everyone wants to spend his money on what best pleases him, and that it was your pleasure to spend some on me. The money you spent was the smallest part of the deed. It was the kindly spirit that prompted the deed that appeals to me.

"I haven't made returns on your investment, but I am going to some day. I've tried to find out these last four years what I can be besides a graduate, but I haven't succeeded as yet. I've gone over the 'female helps' and I cannot find the answer. The Boarder says the way to find anything is to look where no one else does, so maybe I might meet luck if I searched the 'Male Helps.' You won't misunderstand me, Mr. Derry, when I tell you that my allowance must be stopped from now on. You have given me the means for which I must find the end and the finding mustn't be made too easy for me.

"The first thing I want to do is to get them in a little better shape here. While they make a good living, the profits are scant because the country air has given the children such keen appetites that there is not much provender left to sell. Ma has heard something that promises hope for the future; if it materializes I will write you about it.

"I would awfully like to see you, Mr. Derry,

but I can't let you send the money for me to come over for a year of foreign travel as you advise. I mustn't take the time or the money.

"It must be very late, for there is the call of that lunatic loon, so, good-night, Mr. Derry, though the sun must be shining over there with you.

"Sincerely,

"Amarilly."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN the new telephone was proudly pointed out to Amarilly, she was but mildly and politely interested. Secretly, she thought telephones were more of a nuisance than a convenience.

"People you don't want to talk to are always ringing you up," she said, "and the ones you want to talk to are never successful in getting you."

When her mother had confided to her some of the conversations she had heard over the telephone, however, her interest was at once enlisted.

"Thar's a nigger in the woodpile somewhar's, Amarilly, and I've been waitin' fer you to come and help me skeer him out."

One morning there was a little family flurry, due to a call from the Man at the Corners.

"Where's Amarilly and Ma?" asked Cory excitedly.

"You might know where Ma is," growled

Milton. "She's still got telephonitis and her ear's glued to the phone. I guess Amarilly is there, too."

"Come right in the settin'-room and meet my sister," said Cory proudly.

Mrs. Jenkins stood at the telephone as statuesque as a setter at the scent of game, while Amarilly was gazing supinely out the window.

Courville felt a swift, elating desire to obtain a front view of the small shapely head with its wealth of shining red-brown hair.

"Amarilly," announced Cory in a tone trembling with veneration, "the Man at the Corners."

This appellation brought a little quirk to Amarilly's mouth, but her eyes remained steady and serene as she acknowledged the introduction. Courville was well aware that the look of intense interest upon Mrs. Jenkins' countenance was not due to his august presence, but to something she was getting from the wires, for she made a quick signal for silence and resumed her former "at attention" pose.

"In my letters from home," said Amarilly, as her mother finally hung up the receiver,

"they always referred to you in the way Cory introduced you —"

"It seems to be the only name by which I am known about here," he explained, "and I have come to like it, but for purposes of identification I will own up to 'James L. Courville.'"

"Amarilly," said Mrs. Jenkins excitedly, "I hearn something over that phone then. Jest what we expected. I know you said not to speak of it, but can't I tell him?"

Courville met the penetrating gaze of the young girl. He had never felt his inner self so searched as it was during these few seconds. And yet Amarilly studied him simply to know if she could trust his judgment and confidence.

"I sat for my photograph once," he thought, "but they didn't keep me waiting as long as this."

"They tell me," said Amarilly, "that you are a friend to everyone in the neighborhood. We need one very much now, or, at least, an adviser; so I hope we, too, can come to 'the Man at the Corners.'"

A swift change of expression came over his thin, brown face.

"You may, indeed, Miss Jenkins," he replied gravely.

"You see, while my mother was listening over the phone, she heard some people say we were 'easy marks', and the last ones to 'catch on.' Finally she learned that something, she couldn't make out what, was about to happen that might be to our advantage, so she took to listening in the hope of finding out what the great mystery was. I think she has heard the climax just now. I—"

"Yes," interrupted her mother eagerly, "when I took down the receiver a man by the name of Hoovers who lives acrost the river and ain't friendly to nobody was talkin'. He's a short and three longs, but he'll be all shorts when I git through with him! He was talkin' to his son-in-law's brother, Lon Bilderback, who lives to Piker's Gap and he says: 'Who owns that piece of land acrost the river from Jenkinses cornfield?' 'The Jenkinses owns it and durned poor land it is,' says Hoover. 'Ain't worth the sod that's on it.' 'Don't you think it,' says Bilderback. 'I heard the surveyors for the new railroad talking and they want to cut right through that land.' 'I swan,' comes back Hoover.

'If luck ain't struck them Jenkinses!' 'I'm thinking it's struck me,' says Bilderback. 'Lizzie says those folks never know anything till it's dropped on them hard. They probably don't even know there's goin' to be a railroad. I'm not going to let the grass grow under my feet. I'll jest bike down there after dinner and offer them a fair price for it and sell for a fancy figure to the new road. Some little speculator, what?' 'Go to it,' says Hoover, 'and be sure to do business with Mrs. Jenkins, 'cause she's the softest mark of the lot.'"

Mrs. Jenkins fairly gasped as she repeated this reflection on her mentality.

"Wait," she exclaimed, "till I give that Bilderback a piece of my mind!"

"What we should like to ask your advice about, Mr. Courville," explained Amarilly, "is the price we ought to make to the railroad people, so they, too, won't find us 'easy marks.'"

"It is quite a coincidence," replied Courville, "that I was here on just that matter. I have been away and on my return learned of the proposed new road. I thought it quite likely they would want right of way through

your land, so I figured out what you should receive for it, and took the liberty of offering my advice."

He handed her a piece of paper with some figuring thereon, and she excitedly read aloud the final amount.

"We should never have ventured to expect that much," she said. "And it was awfully kind in you to think of Ma."

"I wish we could do something for *you*," said Mrs. Jenkins wistfully.

"You can. Let me stay and be a mouse in the corner when you have your interview with Mr. Bilderback."

"Of course you may," agreed Amarilly. "Stay and have dinner with us. When Hoover's son-in-law's brother comes, you can slip into that little hallway and leave the door ajar, and then he won't know who advised us as to the price."

"I wish we were going to have a better dinner," said Mrs. Jenkins. "Cory's been to your house so often to eat, and you've never once set at table with us."

"We are going to have a better dinner," said Amarilly. "I'll add some things to the meal Lily Rose has planned."

"I don't want to make you any extra work," he said doubtfully.

"You can help with the extra work, if you will."

"Why, Amarilly!" remonstrated Mrs. Jenkins.

"I never was afraid of anyone, you know, Ma, unless it was Mr. St. John, just a wee bit. That was because he was so good."

"Oh, come —" began Courville in objection.

"His goodness is a different kind from yours," she explained.

She called in her forces and set them to work.

"You can set the table, Co."

"In the settin'-room?" asked Cory.

"Of course," said Mrs. Jenkins.

"No," objected Amarilly. "You see we want the sitting-room right after dinner. We'll eat on the side porch that Bobby screened in. You might help Bud take the table out, Mr. Courville."

When Courville returned from this duty, Amarilly was humming softly to herself as she mixed flour and butter into close relations. The soft breeze coming through the

window had loosened the luxuriant locks of her hair; her cheeks were peach tinted and her eyes were dancing in the thought of the good news they had just learned.

"Domestic science idealized!" thought Courville.

"Please, what are you making?" he asked after a moment.

"Shortcake, for dessert."

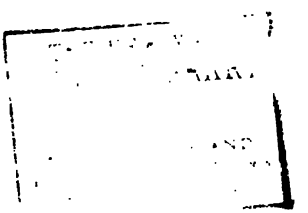
He seated himself on the window sill and watched her as she plunged her hands anew into the soft, white, clinging dough which she transferred from the mixing bowl to the board and began to roll into piecrust thickness. He liked the little air of unconcern she showed at the intrusion of a stranger. He had speculated a great deal about her in the past year, and now he found that he had got to rearrange his prejudgment.

"Is that the way you do it?" he asked interestedly, as she thinned the crust and deftly fitted it to the tins, trimming off the superfluous edges. "What's going inside?"

"Wild strawberries. I promised to make Iry and Ceely each a little individual one. I will bake another for you."



" Is that the way you do it? " he asked interestedly. *Page 50.*



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"I feel a boy again."

"That's the way to feel. Now, while these are baking, we'll go out and plunder Lily Rose's pet flower bed."

At the dinner table Amarilly informed them that they were to have a matinée, and that the leading man, the villain, was a stranger. There was a Jenkins' clamor for details as to the identity of the villain and the rest of the cast.

"It's to be dialogue," she explained, "between the villain and Ma, and you must all remember that not one of you is to take part. You are merely to be the audience until the villain is disposed of and then you can speak any piece you like. There will be souvenirs given away."

"Something to eat?" asked Cory expectantly.

"It will seem like old times," said Bobby, "to be having shows. Remember, Amarilly, how you used to come home from the theater and teach us how to act?"

Courville had never before been brought into such intimate relations with his nearest neighbors, and he was a delighted and amused listener to their chatter, shrewdly sensing,

however, that there was one hostile presence in the person of Lily Rose.

When they adjourned to the sitting-room, the Jenkins family were all on the tiptoe of expectancy. A knock at the door was the signal for Amarilly's directions.

"That's the curtain call. Get into your private box, please, Mr. Courville, and draw the curtains. Enter villain, left center."

The Boarder opened the door and a wiry, wrinkled man, whose gimlet eyes seemed trying each to look at the other, came briskly into the room.

"Howdy!" he said, including the entire assembly in his greeting. "I just dropped in on a little business, Mrs. Jenkins. Do you own that piece of land across the river from your cornfield?"

"Yes; that is my sheer of the place," said Mrs. Jenkins glibly.

Milton's mouth opened for a decided protest against the allotted ownership of the land in question, but a warning boot-thrust at his shins, administered by Flamingus, painfully reminded him of Amarilly's admonition.

"Would you be willing to sell the land?" continued Bilderback.

"I guess she would, if anyone was fool enough to buy it," interposed Cory, forgetting the coaching.

The prospective buyer laughed easily. "The soil is mighty poor — milked dry — but I thought maybe I could rent it for a camping place to hunters and fishing parties. I'll give you a fair price for it, Mrs. Jenkins."

"What do you call a fair price?" demanded Mrs. Jenkins warily.

He named a sum which caused the Boarder to interrupt the play.

"You've not been long in these parts," he said. "We wouldn't go fer to take advantage of no one in that way. 'Twould be robbery."

"Mr. Bilderback," declared Mrs. Jenkins, ignoring the Boarder and looking the villain straight in the eye, "you'll have to multiply that 'ere 'fair price' a good many times afore I listen to you."

"Mrs. Jenkins!" began the Boarder, but paused at a significant signal in the shape of a crescendo cough from Amarilly.

"You know, Mrs. Jenkins, that that land isn't good for anything."

"Ain't it?" she retorted. "I guess the railroad company will think it good enough to

lay rails on next spring. You air a stranger, but you can't take us in. I 'spose someone told you that the Jenkins were easy. You jest go back and tell 'em to guess onct more, and when you hear the locomotive whistle, get off the track."

The villain rose, utterly routed by this taunt, and with no further parley, hiked and biked for Piker's Gap.

Courville emerged from his "box" and gave belated applause.

"How did you get next, Ma?" clamored the chorus.

"Over the phone. So, Milt, you won't be so sassy next time you see me listening. Of course the Man to the Corners here told me what the land would be wuth to the railroad company."

"You certainly give Bilderback his'n," said the Boarder gleefully. "You allers was right there with the ammernition, Mrs. Jenkins, when it come to the firing line."

Milton was already figuring on what his share of the returns would be.

"Divide by nine instead of ten, Milt," directed Amarilly, looking over his shoulder.

"You have all done the work here, and I haven't helped to earn a dividend."

There was a general protest, but they knew of old that it was useless to combat Amarilly's decisions.

"Ma and Lily Rose ought to have the lion's share," she declared. "If it hadn't been for what Ma heard, and if Lily Rose hadn't bought the telephone —"

"It was little Surplus what paid for the phone," said Lily Rose.

"I won't take a cent of the money, unless you have your share, Amarilly," said Bud. "You need it 'cause you ain't going to take any more from Mr. Derry."

Amarilly flushed under a quick glance from Courville.

"Oh, I am going to make me a fortune soon," she said lightly. "Ma, you don't look as happy as you ought."

"I was a thinkin', that I jest know as how Iry'll git run over by the furst injine that comes along our land."

"It won't hurt him any," assured Amarilly, "but it'll be some months before the cars are running, and by that time maybe Iry will learn to 'stop, look, and listen.' We'll

have railroad drills and put him through the paces."

When Courville reluctantly took his departure, he asked Amarilly to walk down to the river and view the right of way for the road.

"Do you know," he said when they were walking through the fields, "I have an idea we are going to be good friends as well as neighbors. I must warn you that I am often an unhappy, moody sort of person, and when I am that way, please remember that I don't want to be disagreeable, but that I am vainly struggling to forget a wretched past. I think you will help me, perhaps, to a better angle of vision. You seem cheerful and optimistic."

"I think the members of a large family like ours," she replied, "are apt to be cheerful. You see we never get a chance to reflect, because some one is always talking."

"Cory, for instance," he said, with a reminiscent smile, as he proceeded to tell her of his first meeting with her little sister.

After that, the conversation went on easily and pleasantly, so that it was quite late in the afternoon when Amarilly returned to the house. She found Cory in tears and it was

some time before she could prevail upon her to tell her troubles.

"I knowed him first," said Cory finally between sobs, "first of anyone, and it ain't fair for you to have everyone. I've knowed him a whole year and he's fergot me already."

The little girl's grief was so genuine that Amarilly overcame her surprise and amusement, and quickly came to her comfort.

"Why, Cory, if you've known him for a whole year, you've naturally talked of me to him, and so of course he would be interested in meeting your sister. He hasn't forgotten you, because the last thing he said to me was that you and I were to spend tomorrow afternoon at the Corners and that he and you would show me over the place, and that you would help him serve tea in the summer house."

The promise of a rainbow crept into the little tear-shower.

"He'll larn to like you best, though," she mourned, "'cause you talk stylish — like him."

"Now, Cory, didn't Mr. Derry like me when I spoke much more incorrectly than you do?"

"Did you?" asked Cory hopefully.

"I did; and there is no reason why you can't learn to speak the way Mr. Courville does. I'll teach you as Mr. Derry did me. He gave me two words a day, and when you forget, you must think of Mr. Courville and try again."

CHAPTER V

AMARILLY was awakened early one morning by the sound of voices in that lowered, confidential key that carries so effectively, and arouses such intense interest.

"Yes; the Man at the Corners would be a fine mate for her," her mother was saying. "He is steady and moneyfied. I b'lieve she's gittin' to keer for him, too."

"'Moneyfied,'" pondered Amarilly. "That's a new word to me, but it does seem to spell cash in bigger letters than any of its synonyms."

"I hed so set my heart on her and Mr. Derry," sighed Lily Rose, after a moment.

"Oh, no," denied Mrs. Jenkins. "Amarilly looks on him like she does the boys. She let me read the letters he's wrote her sence she's been to school, and there ain't no hint of nothin' like that."

"'Cause he thinks of her as a kid, like she was when he left. If he could jest see her now — growed so handsome!"

"He won't see her, 'cause she's too sot against lettin' him pay her way acrost, and he ain't a-comin home fer years, Mrs. St. John says."

The voices grew fainter. Amarilly sat upright in bed, her cheeks crimson.

"Oh, dear!" she thought in dismay, "the thing that most appeals to me in the descriptions of Heaven is that there is no marriage or giving in marriage. Everyone — the girls at school, Mrs. St. John and all of them here, except Ma, who has some sense, is trying to build up a romance and wish me on Mr. Derry just because he was generous and kind to me when I was a little scrub-girl. I am not going to be sentimental over Mr. Courville or anyone, because I must turn all my time, thought, and energy to trying to do something. I see plainly that country life is not conducive to ambition. Unless you watch out, you get to walking with your head down like the cattle. I can feel grass growing under my feet now after only two weeks. Thanks to the railroad, I won't have to worry about the future for Ma and the children, so I can be up and doing for myself. Before the sun sets, I shall decide on some plan. Better

a mis-step than a standstill. I'm glad I overheard them. Other folks' opinions make good whetstones to rub your dulness on."

After breakfast Amarilly hastened through her share of the housework, and then started out in search of a place where she could be assured of undisturbed solitude while she concentrated on a plan for self-support.

"There's a bull in the meadow, snakes by the river, crawly things in the woods, folks in the house. In the orchard I'd be in plain sight, but I know what I can do. I can climb an apple tree. No one ever looks higher than their head in the country, unless it's to watch for rain-signs, and there's no fear for rain to-day."

She went into the orchard and was selecting the most climbable tree, when Cory called to her that the "mail man" had come and brought her two letters.

"Hurry up, Amarilly!" she urged. "We want you to know Jerry Pryne."

"I think I do know you," said Amarilly, to the carrier on R.F.D. Number Six. "Every letter from home mentioned you."

"And I am well acquainted with your handwriting," he returned. "You must

know, Miss Jenkins, that this place is the end of my route, and it's been like the end of the rainbow to me, but with a pot of honey instead of a pot of gold in waiting. Sometimes it's been a glass of milk, a bunch of flowers, a little luncheon — always something, but this is my last trip on the mail route."

He interrupted the chorus of consternation that came from as many of the family as had assembled.

"I'll see more of you because I'll be your next neighbor. Mr. Courville has made me manager of his place, and I'm to have a little cottage and ten acres of my own down on the river road. He's a prince, that man."

"He is," agreed Cory solemnly.

When the carrier had driven away, Amarilly inspected her letters.

"One is from Mrs. St. John, and the other's from Brenda, so she hasn't started for home yet."

The postscript to Colette's letter rubbed her sensitive spot the wrong way and ruffled her slender brows into a semi-frown as she read:

"I wrote Derry Phillips that the Man at the Corners seemed to be taking *his* place in the hearts of the Snydikits."

"I should have known better," thought Amarilly, "than to have written her so fully about Mr. Courville."

She had read but a few lines of Brenda's letter when she gave a startled exclamation.

"What is it, Amarilly?" begged the on-gazing family, as she continued reading at lightning speed.

"Brenda and five other girls I knew at college are going abroad for a six months' tour. Helen Wayne's aunt is to chaperon them, but they want me to go along to look after the luggage, make hotel reservations, study time-tables, pay the bills, etc. They will all chip in and pay my expenses."

"Well, Amarilly Jenkins, thar's no use talking. You was born under a lucky star," exclaimed her mother.

"You bet she was!" declared Bobby. "Under more than one lucky star."

"Mos' likely 'twas under the Big Dipper," speculated Cory.

"Can you do all those things, Amarilly?" asked Milton wonderingly.

"Surely I can. I have a gift for time-tables and I know how to beat the taxi-drivers on time-keeping."

"Will you go to Paris?" asked Lily Rose excitedly.

"Yes; we go there first and then to Spain and Italy."

"When do you start?" asked Bud.

"In a week."

"Oh, Amarilly, you come and go like fireflies," said Mrs. Jenkins ruefully, "but I wouldn't say a mite of a word to keep you."

"And you'll see Mr. Derry!" exclaimed Lily Rose ecstatically.

"Yes," replied Amarilly. "Only to-day I was thinking that it would be years before I could go abroad, and here I am, starting right at the top. For six months I will be earning only my expenses, but it will brush some of the cobwebs off my brains — I mean wits — and may lead to my finding what I can do."

"Now, listen here, Amarilly," said the Boarder, when he was told of the coming event, "you'll be wanting spending money and you'll need fixings. You've got —"

"No," anticipated Amarilly firmly. "I have plenty of money. You see Mr. Derry sent Mrs. St. John a big check to spend for graduating things for me, and when I told her that was to be the last check I should take

from him, Mr. St. John wouldn't let her spend it all on clothes, but had her save out some to tide me over while I was getting located."

Later Courville came over, as he had dropped into the habit of doing every day since he first met Amarilly.

"I am going to take a postgraduate course," Amarilly told him.

"Oh, have you decided on a profession?" he asked, smiling.

"Not a profession; an occupation, and only a temporary one. Of all the pursuits, listed and unlisted, this is the only one that never occurred to me. A courier!"

"It may easily lead to other things," he said reflectively, when she had furnished the details.

"He doesn't know it," thought Lily Rose exultantly, "but it will lead to Mr. Derry."

"I am glad," said Courville wistfully, "that you have such a fine opportunity to travel, but I shall miss you. I had looked forward to teaching you this summer to love the country."

"I do love it — in a sense," she replied. "If I didn't, your paradise of a place would teach me the beauty of nature; but you see it's a case of Malaga grapes and I prefer the raisins of Smyrna."

CHAPTER VI

The Log of a Courier.
First night out (Aboard ship).

BRENDA must never know that I am doing this. She says only two classes of people have the diary habit — children, and old maids who live uneventful lives. But I'll probably never have anything so big as crossing the ocean happen to me again, so I must put it on record.

For the last busy week, I have been a Bureau of Misinformation, and my first lull of leisure came when I was sure that the various belongings of my little party were deposited in their staterooms. Then I joined the others at the rail who were looking down in final farewell upon groups of friends.

Of course there was no one on the pier to "leave-take" me, so I picked out the ones who looked the most interesting and appropriated them for my own, bowing and waving to them unawares.

When we had unpacked we made a tour of inspection of the ship. It was a maiden voyage for all of us but Brenda, who had crossed twice before. She has mentioned this so frequently that we call her "Old Salty" and "The Veteran."

She got even with me, though, for she met some people she knew and introduced me as "Mrs. Cook."

When the steamer mail was distributed I knew I couldn't carry out the bluff as I had done in farewells, but to my joy and surprise I received four letters. A round robin from home, instigated by Mr. Courville, and one from him. The others were from Mrs. St. John and one of my teachers. Mr. St. John sent me some books.

When we finally came out to locate on deck, the waves had begun a little game of gay-go-up and gay-go-down, so we sought a sheltered spot.

"I am glad, Brenda," said Mrs. Wayne presently, with a brave attempt at a smile, "that you showed me around while I was able to take notice. I fear my vision from now on will be bounded by the walls of my stateroom."

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"Don't invite forebodings so soon," encouraged Brenda. "You'll get used to it."

"But I don't want to get used to it!" protested Mrs. Wayne wanly.

At dinner I was so interested in watching the passengers, I didn't pay much attention to what I was eating.

"Fifty-seven varieties," murmured Brenda, following my wandering glances.

"Look them all over, Amarilly," Helen warned me. "There are many you will never see again on this voyage."

"They do well to 'eat, drink and be merry,'" sighed Mrs. Wayne, "for by tomorrow they'll think they are going to die."

We had a jolly evening with all kinds of entertainments. I stole away earlier than the others to start my log. I was almost caught in the act by Brenda, who came up to see why I had left them. I just had time to slip the log out of sight and pick up a magazine which I opened at random.

"You must have found something very interesting to stay cooped up here," she declared. "What is it?"

I handed her the magazine.

"'What I know about logging,' she read. "Why, Amarilly, what in the world can you find in logging to be interesting?"

The coincidence made it difficult not to laugh.

"I am something of a loggerhead," I told her.

Log No. 2.
Second Night.

When I awoke this morning I felt like the old woman in Mother Goose — "Oh! deary, deary me, this is none of I!" But Brenda established my identity as the lucky girl who was crossing the ocean, bound for France.

"The ship seems to be rolling every way but the right one," I remarked.

"She must be trying to reduce," she said. "It is early, but don't you feel a longing for more air?"

I certainly did; so we dressed and went out on deck. The wild waves were saying it, whatever it is, very emphatically.

"You never saw the ocean before, did you, Amarilly?"

"Only from shore. It is certainly a grand

sight; but after all, it is only a lot of sudsy water going up and down like an elevator. It makes me think of the Subway express — doesn't stop between times."

"Do you know," said Brenda with a little shudder, "if it goes one inch higher, — I'll — die! I feel as if someone were sitting astride my chest."

"Oh, Brenda, and it's your third crossing!"

"It's evidently three times and out for me. I think you'll have to support me back to the berth."

When I had made her as comfortable as I could, it seemed to be time for the others to appear. I went to call them and found them all in the state in which I had left Brenda, so I was busy rendering first and last aid. Then Mrs. Wayne insisted on my going out for a little deck tramp.

"We must have one of our party able to be up and about," she declared, "so you do all you can to keep in good condition."

The promenade deck was entirely deserted, quite different from yesterday when the passengers were all cruising in couples. I had felt such an atom among them — such a very minute atom; but to-day I have been

the monarch of all I surveyed. I began my walk, or stagger, feeling guilty at being the sole survivor of my party. It seems odd to be a hermit on an ocean steamer.

It was very lonely, though. I felt like the boy on the burning deck until I saw there was one other who hadn't fled. As I turned a sharp angle I sighted a man ahead. I trailed after him Indian fashion for a while and then passed him. He looked at me in surprise and as if he wanted to speak. I felt the same way, probably more so. Silence was never cultivated in our family. I had not dared speak to the few green and gray-faced women lined up in the cabin for fear of sympathetic contagion.

In spite of Mrs. Wayne's course of coaching to the party and to the courier, I felt that it would be mere affectation to observe conventions under these conditions. It was as if we were alone on a desert island.

I slackened my pace and he soon overtook me. Speech came mutually and spontaneously. We made one more round and then sat down in a secluded corner. I soon discovered that since conversation had been my object, I might better have let well

enough alone, for I scarcely wedged in a word.

He was a very ordinary looking man, quite neutral in figure, with no more expression than a piece of pussy willow. He told me that his name was J. Perigreen Lyle and that he wrote plays. He is composing one now and is crossing to get atmosphere. There is certainly plenty of it to get and his play should be breezy. After a while I returned to my charges, but in the afternoon I again went into deck training. I was joined by J. P. L. and he rehearsed to me parts of the play he had in contemplation. I answered back in stage vernacular, whereupon he triumphantly told me he had already guessed I was an actress. He said it was my walk. (The ship's roll does effect one's gait.) I think the color of my hair had something to do with his surmise, and then it occurred to me he might think I was crossing alone. I explained that I was a college graduate and one of a party that had a perfectly proper chaperon under cover. There was a slight change in his manner then which made me feel like reversing and explaining how I came to be familiar with stage

matters. However, my short innings at speech were interrupted, as he again began on his obsession.

Last Log.

For intervening time, ditto the second log. The days, the weather and J. P. L. all looked alike to me. But to-day some one must have oiled the waters, or else they were all just played out and couldn't rise to the occasion. Passengers came out of their staterooms like ants from a hill. It seemed good to have the girls around with me once more, and I told them I wished we were starting all over again, but Mrs. Wayne shuddered and said not to wish anything like that on them.

"Besides," said Brenda, when we had strayed away from the others to a nice little nook off the general thoroughfare, "I am dying to see Mr. Phillips. I'd rather see him than all the sights of Paris. Tell me, Amarilly, which do you think you will fall in love with, Mr. Phillips, or that neighbor of yours, who sent you the steamer letter?"

Brenda, like so many of the girls at school, was always "turning lightly to thoughts of love."

"One is a dear friend and the other, a near neighbor," I told her, "and I shall be too busy to think about falling in love."

"It doesn't take time," replied Brenda.

Shore Log.
Paris.

I had no more time that last day on board ship to finish up my log. Brenda said the only interesting thing about Cherbourg would be the fact that we took the train from there to Paris, but when we landed, Mr. Derry was awaiting us. I had expected to surprise him in Paris, but Colette had cabled him, so the surprise was on me. He took my courier duties away from me and soon had us aboard a train for Paris. En route the girls simply surrounded him. At the hotel he drew me aside for a moment.

"See here, Amarilly," he said, "can't you dismiss Class A? We have four years to bridge over. They talk so much, so trippingly and so — together, it's quite bewildering. At first I thought it was a college yell."

I told him how they had been shut up in their staterooms all the way over and hadn't

had a word with a man. (They didn't count J. Perigreen.)

"Oh, that's it! Well, there's my very good friend Jules, who has a lot of artists on his list. I'll have him give a luncheon at my studio to-morrow for them and see that there's a man each. Do you think that will be enough to satisfy them? Then you and I can slip away for a sight-seeing trip. But why were they shut up in their staterooms? Was it as rough as that?"

"There were head on collisions between the going and coming waves all the way. I was afraid they might charge us double fares because we went up and down so much we really covered the distance twice over."

Just then Brenda spied us.

"Mrs. Wayne says we shouldn't monopolize you, Mr. Phillips, but you see it's our turn. Amarilly had the whole ship and a man all to herself coming over. If they had had a pedometer, it would have measured one hundred miles."

"What sort of a man, Amarilly?" asked Mr. Derry quickly, with his big brother air.

"Nondescript, with a nondescript family back home, but he is going to write a play

that won't be nondescript. It will be a big success or a flat failure."

It was quite late when we dined. Mr. Derry went home at what he called an early hour so that we might feel "fine and fancy" in the morning. The girls were enchanted at the prospect of a luncheon and an artist each.

We had to scramble the next morning to get ready for luncheon, as we overslept. It seemed like old times to eat in a studio and see artists again. I felt as if I ought to do the serving.

Immediately after luncheon Mr. Derry announced that he was going to take me for a motor excursion and show me around. We rode all the afternoon, but there was so much to talk about, he forgot to point out the sights, though he says we passed them all; so I just have a kaleidoscopic remembrance of broad boulevards, beautiful parks and buildings, with lovely whiffs of air.

Mr. Derry is still a boy — no, a boyish man — and his eyes are just as dark and laughing as ever. He is one of the few who can be away for years and yet make you feel you had seen him but yesterday. It's a nice

feeling. We went back to the studio and then —

Brenda came to my room just now with such exciting news that I can write no more to-night.

CHAPTER VII

THE Jenkins family paused in their general onslaught upon their favorite meal of salt pork, jacketed potatoes and milk gravy to listen intently to the sound of wheels and a well-known voice without. The door opened and Amarilly walked in.

"Amarilly! Forever and way back!" cried Mrs. Jenkins.

"No; to Paris and way back," corrected Amarilly. "I feel like the king of France and ten thousand men."

"Whatever brought you back so quick?" asked Mrs. Jenkins. "Didn't you get on with them girls?"

"I bet 'twas Mr. Derry sent you back," guessed Lily Rose.

"Do you mean to tell me you don't know!" cried Amarilly. "Even your weekly paper should —"

"Bobby's goat ate up last week's paper before we took off the wrapper," explained

Cory. "Was it in the paper why you came back?"

"Yes; though they didn't put it just that way. Haven't you heard anything over the telephone?"

"Phone's out of commission," informed Flamingus, "and we've all been too busy to go to town, and Almy's away."

"Go on, and tell us about Paris," begged Bobby. "I want to hear all about it."

"You won't hear much about it from me," replied Amarilly. "I only had a snapshot of Paris. We were glad to leave while the leaving was good."

"The plague, or some of them furrin' diseases?" asked Mrs. Jenkins anxiously.

"War!" replied Amarilly.

This exciting news quickly turned the interest from Amarilly and her travels. The Boarder and the boys devoured the headlines of the papers she had brought with her, and then she gave them a résumé of the contents of previous issues.

"It was a mercy we knowed nothin' about it," said Mrs. Jenkins. "We'd hev worried to death about you. But tell us how far you got."

"Let me see. I wrote you a letter on board ship and mailed it at Cherbourg and sent you a postal from there and another from Paris."

"Yes; and you said you was a-goin' to Mr. Derry's to a party."

"I went there and for a ride in the afternoon; but that very night the bulletins were so alarming, Mr. Derry said we mustn't lose a minute in starting for home. He took us to Calais, and we crossed a choppy channel that made the ocean seem a Paradise Lost. We all went straight to Liverpool where we were fortunate enough to get passage on one of the first steamers out."

"Oh, is Mr. Derry here?" asked Lily Rose hopefully.

"No; he came as far as Liverpool and then went back to London. He is coming over later."

"Tell us all about him, Amarilly. How does he look? Was he glad to see you?"

"He looks just as he did and he doesn't act any differently."

"Didn't he think you'd learned an orful lot?" asked Mrs. Jenkins.

"I didn't have an opportunity to show off

but one accomplishment. I was the only one of our party who could speak French so as to be understood. He asked me how in the world I'd learned Paris French instead of the college brand. I told him Mrs. Ogilvie's maid had been in this country but a few weeks when I went with them to the mountains. I used to talk to her because she was so homesick, and she taught me to speak French as she did. Mr. Derry said that was my reward for being a good mixer."

"But didn't he think you changed?" asked Lily Rose.

"I think not; he said I looked just as he expected me to look."

Lily Rose manifested great disappointment.

"Well, your trip kind of petered out," said Mrs. Jenkins sympathetically. "Be you sorry you went, Amarilly?"

"No; it was a wonderful experience, and then it made a sort of coupling link between college and life."

"Made up your mind yet what you're a-goin' to do?" inquired the Boarder.

"Yes; that is, for a few weeks. Mr. Lyle appeared on deck again coming home, and I offered him my services to typewrite

the new play he is composing. I am going to the city to-morrow and then out to Oakridge where he lives. I shall come home for week-ends, of course."

"I'm afeard," said her mother, "that Mr. Derry'll be disappinted after all your fine eddication to find out you're jest runnin' a typewriter."

"It's the first bird in my hand," replied Amarilly, "and I'll hold it until I can coax some more out of the bush."

"We won't none of us be early birds, I'm a-thinkin'," said Mrs. Jenkins, "unless we go to bed."

It had been a warm, close day, but a cool breeze swept generously through Amarilly's casement windows all night, and she slept until the sun was midway to meridian.

"That's the first straight sleep I've had in weeks," she thought. "How did I ever escape the morning matin of the fowlery! I feel sufficiently alert and renewed to look myself in the eye and not dodge things any longer."

"Amarilly Jenkins," she exclaimed to her reflection in the mirror, a few moments later, "you have known right along, even if you

wouldn't own up to it, that you've been weaving a silly little story these four years. You imagined a fairy godmother had been standing over you, waving a magic wand that would transform you into a wonderful being that would completely overwhelm Mr. Derry with amazement when he beheld what his generosity had wrought. And when he saw you and said so casually: 'You haven't changed a bit, Amarilly', it was as though some one had poured a pitcher of icewater over you. Served you right and did you good. Probably everything you try to do will end just that way — in a farce; but then, after all, a farce is better than a tragedy."

"Amarilly," Cory called from the stairway, "Mr. Courville is here."

"Has our neighbor lost his nickname?" wondered Amarilly.

CHAPTER VIII

THE next day Amarilly went to the city and joined the troop of transients marching from door to door in fruitless search for "something nice, but inexpensive" — two adjectives that rarely keep company.

Her attention was attracted by a limestone house-front, with awnings and window boxes, on an unfashionable but pleasant street.

"Probably far beyond my means, but you can't tell always by externals," she thought as she rang the bell.

The landlady, fifty, fat and fussy, "showed her through." The first floor was divided into three-room suites with bath and occupied by prosperous people with incomes that did not escape the assessor's eye.

She looked at these offerings but casually, remarking that she did not wish so much room. The landlady quickly charged on to the second floor which was in suites of two with bath.

"In business and most places," thought Amarilly, keeping steadily on to the third, "the higher up you go, the greater your caste and cost, but in rooming houses, it seems to be the reverse."

She felt more at home on this floor where the rooms were single and baths occasional; so she began to appear interested and ask questions, the answers to which sent her still higher.

At the end of the long hallway of the fourth floor she came to a room of cell-size proportions. A cot, a small chest of drawers and a chair made it seem cluttered.

"This would be very handy," she reflected. "I could lie in the cot and touch everything in the room. I'd have to eat some of Alice in Wonderland's cake, though, to squeeze in."

The price of the room made forcible appeal.

"It would seem spacious if I called it a Pullman reservation," she thought, "and it's really quite up to stateroom accommodations."

She agreed to take the room, and her ready compliance with advance rent demands restored her in a measure to the landlady's favor, which had waned in proportion to each flight of stairs ascended. Moreover, these

fourth floor rooms were hard to rent, because "cookers," if caught in the act, were disbarred, and people able to "eat out" wanted more pretentious lodgings.

Amarilly ordered her luggage sent up and then went by suburban train to Oakridge.

"Half way house to the country," she commented, as she came down the one and only street of the little town. "Looks like a toy village, or the stage settings for one."

She was shown to a study at the rear of the second story of J. Perigreen Lyle's house and bidden to await his arrival. On a table was a miniature stage with all settings complete, and in the flies were various little figures of men, women and children. She was absorbed in the wonders of this fascinating little device when the playwright entered. He explained the workings of the contrivance, touching buttons here and there that sent forth the figures needed.

"They move so quickly, you see, that I don't lose the thread of my theme."

"It's like moving pictures, only better," said Amarilly. "I am always impatient of the time they give you to read the lines which

seem so superfluous — mere voicing of the obvious. But where did you find such a wonderful little theater?"

"We have a village genius here, an inventor. I told him what I wanted and he worked it out. He can invent anything."

"Who is he?" she asked, wondering if he couldn't invent a profession for her.

"His name is Sydney Marsden. I think we can begin the play now."

Amarilly's nimble fingers flew mechanically over the keys, her mind concentrated on thoughts of his play, which started most promisingly. Once he made such a prolonged pause that she turned curiously. He was evidently groping for a word. In spite of knowing that she should not do so, unbidden, she could not refrain from suggesting one.

"No," he replied. "That is not the word."

"It was," thought Amarilly, "it was the only word for the place; but he is too contrary to accept it. I must learn to speak only when spoken to. I know how he feels, too, about being interrupted. It's like having some one walk heavy across the floor when there's a cake in the oven."

Dictation didn't progress very swimmingly. Finally he bade her tear up the pages she had written and he began anew. When he announced that he was through for the day, it didn't seem to Amarilly that he had even made a beginning. He kept her there for an hour discoursing on the play.

"People who talk so much about one thing," she philosophized, "lack listeners, so he is paying a salary to one."

"I trust," she thought, when she was finally able to depart, "that my remuneration is not to be estimated by the number of typewritten pages I turn out exclusive of those he has me destroy, else I won't earn more than enough to pay my car fare out and in."

She then asked him what salary she was to receive.

"I'll reimburse you for your time," he replied in a tone that seemed to indicate that the matter of payment was of trifling moment.

"Probably," pursued Amarilly, "on some days we will turn out several pages, and other days, none; but still like a soldier I will be here on duty, so I should draw pay like one — small, but steady and sure."

He ran over her work.

"Accurate, neat and in correct form," he criticized, "and you are very quick at taking. Any reasonable recompense you name will be satisfactory to me."

"I mustn't be grasping like my landlady," she thought, "nor undervaluing."

The price she named was mutually agreeable, and she went to her little lodgings well satisfied.

The succeeding days were much like the first one, and her struggles with her inclination to "suggest" were stupendous sometimes, but she muzzled her mentality as well as her tongue until she came to feel quite machine-made.

Her interest in the little stage was the means of her making the acquaintance of Sydney Marsden and his sister, Miss Roxy, to whom she paid frequent visits.

One day she went from Oakridge to the Merediths in response to a telephone call.

While she was giving Colette a fair imitation of J. Perigreen Lyle "at dictation", she became conscious that her friend's dancing eyes were focused on someone else. She turned quickly.

"Oh, Mr. Derry!" she exclaimed joyfully, meeting the outstretched hands and laughing eyes of the tall young man who was looking down upon her with a sort of tender amusement, "you come on for all the world like one of J. Perigreen's little stage figures."

"Really, Amarilly, I can't imagine how that is, but somehow I feel that it is a way you like."

"When did you come?"

"To-day. I am the surprise Mrs. Meredith telephoned she had for you."

"And now," said Colette to Amarilly, "I shall tell him what a false start you have made."

"A false start is better than none," declared Amarilly.

"With all her capabilities," continued Colette, "Amarilly is simply typewriting."

"Only pro tem., Mr. Derry," added Amarilly.

"Pro tem. or pro semper, Amarilly, I'll wager you are a crackerjack of a typist, but what's the system?"

"She made the acquaintance of someone aboard ship," said Colette, "who writes plays, and she is copying one for him. She

has a room, goodness knows where, and she takes tea with a queer old inventor — and altogether it was time you returned."

"I think so, too," laughed Derry. "I want to go about with you, Amarilly. You always had the knack of picking up unusual and interesting people. To-morrow you must introduce me to the inventor."

"To-morrow," replied Amarilly, "will be Sunday, and I am going home to-night as I do every Saturday night."

"Of course, and I am going with you to see them all."

CHAPTER IX

WITHIN an hour after his arrival, Derry had made the rounds of the farm with the Boarder, had induced the chubby, cherubic Ceely to pose for a sketch to present to her delighted mother, had rescued Iry from a hornet's nest and hob-nobbed with the family generally.

"He always laughs with us," Lily Rose confided to her husband, "but the Man at the Corners only smiles, and sometimes I feel he is smiling *at* us instead of with us."

After dinner the next day, Derry asked Amarilly to help him select a bit of landscape along the river for a sketch.

When they came from the close-cropped field into the pasture lane, he stood still and drew in a deep breath of the clover-scented air.

"This is great!" he declared. "Aren't you getting acclimated, or are you the same little gamin?"

"I know it's very beautiful, but, Mr. Derry, don't you love the sound of the wheels going round? Here in the country every time a rooster crows in the early morning, you wonder when he is going to repeat, and you stay awake to see, but in town the sounds go right along regularly like a clock ticking."

"But look up through all this green and see how blue the sky is."

"It's just as blue when you look at it up between the skyscrapers."

"And you don't see pictures in the cows in the lane there, — the sheep huddled together in the meadow?"

"The cows have a hooking expression and the sheep have no originality. They just follow the flock. And those silly, clucking hens picking at the grass all the time, with their foolish heads turned over those strutting roosters! No; I like city scenes with humans in them."

"All that redeems your sordid little soul in my eyes is your innate taste in colors. Here is the sketch I'll make," he added, as they came through the woods to the river's edge.

She seated herself on a log and watched

him as he mentally measured the space he intended to transfer to canvas.

"Well," he asked, after a long silence in which he sketched quickly and vividly. "I am awaiting your criticism. How do you think it is coming?"

"I suppose," she said a little dubiously, "I am not trained yet to the French school—lots of color and less of shape. At long range you think you see the sky and trees and water and things all mapped out, and then as you walk toward it, everything comes and goes and runs together, and you decide it was just the mirage of a picture that you first saw. The colors hurt my eyes. Your little clump of wild stuff there looks like things tipped over in the ice-box. You've made your trees a golf green, and at this time of the year, just before they turn, they should be olive."

"What might golf green be, Amarilly? It's a brand new shade on me."

"Take notice the next time you go on the links. It's a newer green — more yellow than a shaded lawn."

"With your line on colors, Amarilly, it's a wonder you haven't taken up interior decorating."

"Maybe I will. There isn't an occupation I haven't considered. I may as well own up, Mr. Derry, that education hasn't seemed to overcome my ruling passion of younger days. Moneymaking appeals to me, and I feel that I must find another 'surplus' in some shape or another."

"You doubtless will. It takes time, you know, to crank up and steer out of the speed-limit zone; but, I am going to 'fess up, too. This sketch is a burlesque of the real thing — a frame-up to test you. I'm delighted that you didn't like it. I didn't come here to paint or discuss art, however," he added, leaving his easel, and seating himself beside her on the log. "I came to renew that snatch of conversation we had in our flight from Calais, which was interrupted by one or more of your friends. I —"

He paused to gaze back into the woods at the sound of the crackling of brush.

"Who's the man?" he asked quickly, his artist's eye attracted by the suppressed strength in the stalwart shoulders of the lean-fibred man approaching.

"Oh, it is Mr. Courville! Don't you like the way he walks, as if he were bred

in forests? That's the way he has gone through life, stepping over obstacles instead of stumbling over them, although he had one tremendous fall."

"I am glad he's side-stepped this time," remarked Derry, watching the retreat. "So you like a high-stepper, Amarilly?"

"You have never had to step high. The way was always cleared for you before you came. Just a smooth-paved highway before you, and you've always been well-shod."

"Don't for a moment make the mistake of thinking life isn't a tough road for the rich to travel. Money brings all sorts of stumbling blocks even on the broad highway. Happiness, after all, is merely a case of getting what you want, and it's generally something you can't get, rich or poor. The poor are always longing for riches, and riches aren't so hard to acquire as what the rich man wants—something money can't buy."

"What, for instance?" demanded Amarilly.

"Well — the moon, maybe."

"He shouldn't want anything so useless as the moon would be to him, and if he did get it, he wouldn't know what to do with it, or else he'd get tired of it."

"Amarilly," he asked bluntly, after a moment, "are you falling in love with this high-stepper of a man?"

"I know less about love than I do about art, and I shall have no time for either."

"Mrs. St. John wrote me —"

"That was one of her little pleasantries. Mr. Courville has his own little story."

"Has he confided the story of his life to you already?"

"Yes; his story wasn't a love-story. Something more tragic. He's very unhappy, and yet he has been brave about it. That was why he bought a place here in the country so that he wouldn't be downed by his moods. You must see his farm. He didn't make it all into fields — crop-fields. He left a great part of it as it was, a jungle of gardens, woods, marsh, lake — I can't describe it. We'll go down and see it."

"Too much of nature about it to appeal to you long. Wait, Amarilly, until I set up the studio I have in mind. You will like it better than you will the most beautiful farm in the world. So I have it all over your farmer friend there. Are you sure you aren't a little bit touched by his story and —"

Her eyes met his squarely with all the frankness of a young boy.

"I like him very much, Mr. Derry; but I am not making him a hero — as Cory is inclined to do."

Something in the scrutinizing gaze she met this time disconcerted her, and her eyes dropped.

"Amarilly, have you ever made a hero of anyone — say — when you were Co's age —"

There was another crashing of fallen boughs, and Bobby appeared.

"It's supper-time," he announced.

Lily Rose stood at the door watching them come up the lane, Amarilly a little in advance and Bobby eagerly talking with Derry.

"Amarilly's heart's asleep," she thought. "It ain't waked up yet."

CHAPTER X

DERRY quite approved the exterior of Amarilly's lodgings and she discreetly forebore to mention the dimensions and location of her room. After he had satisfied himself as to the ratings of J. Perigreen Lyle and had made the acquaintance of the Marsdens, he was convinced that Amarilly, as of old, was equal to all occasions.

He established himself in most artistic and luxurious quarters and his studio was besieged by art aspirants. He responded to but few of the hospitable overtures extended him, the door of John Meredith's house being among the chosen ones of those opened to him.

"Mr. Phillips," said Colette impetuously, one afternoon soon after his return, "can't you induce Amarilly to take up something worth while?"

His eyes twinkled.

"I know better than to play with the buzz saw. Amarilly's vision is perfect and her hair is red. As long as she sees straight,

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anything she takes up she will eventually make worth while."

"Weren't you surprised in her wonderful change of appearance when you saw her in Cherbourg?"

"I didn't think her changed," he replied. "Just naturally developed along the lines my artist's eye foresaw. The secret of Amarilly's charm isn't in her appearance, but in a certain — shall I call it vividness? — the glad-you-are-alive feeling she gives one."

Colette's comment was withheld by reason of the entrance of Amarilly.

"J. Perigreen must have been dictating a jubilee," remarked Colette. "You certainly look keyed up, Amarilly."

"There was one thrilling scene, but it was entirely impromptu and, well, speaking of keys, Mr. Lyle is looking for someone else to operate them."

"Oh, you came to your senses and resigned!" exclaimed Colette approvingly.

"No; I lost my senses and — my services were dispensed with."

"How horrid! I knew a man with such a name —"

"Now, Mrs. St. John! I hurried up here

to tell you because I thought you would be so pleased."

"I am, with the main issue; but I don't want you undervalued even by a Perigreen. What was the trouble?"

"You see he really has the makings of a play if he'd only work it up right. To-day he was dictating a scene that he could have made big — his principal scene — and it was a perfect fiasco. I glued my tongue to the roof of my mouth and kept it there all the time he was dictating, but when I was leaving and still censoring my speech, he must ask me in a supremely satisfied tone what I thought of his masterpiece. The lid of my reserve was pressed up and suddenly flew off and my honest opinion escaped. You'll understand, Mr. Derry; it was as though some artist was painting a really good picture and then suddenly went color-blind, took a brush, daubed an ugly color across the best part of it and then coolly asked you how you liked it."

"I am glad you were true to your colors, Amarilly," approved Derry.

"And now," said Colette, "after wasting all these weeks —"

"Not wasting," objected Amarilly. "If Mr. Lyle couldn't handle situations, he could words. His vocabulary is so versatile, I've really had a post-graduate course in English."

"Well, I hope you will take up something far different now," said Colette.

"You must remember," pleaded Amarilly, "that I am but one of a million more or less graduates let out to hunt for fields, and I haven't found one yet. I seem to be a drug on the market."

"You used to have a monopoly of schemes."

"I must find a stop-gap first. I am on my way in search of one now."

"Postpone that for a day or so and do a commission for me. John and I have decided to adopt a child. We are of the opinion that you more than anyone can tell the good points of a boy — for it's a boy we want. There is a Children's Home up-state a little way that Mr. St. John is interested in. I want you to go there and make a few selections. Then we will follow some day and take the fairest one of your pick."

"I'd love to do that!" exclaimed Amarilly.

"There is a morning train which will give

you time to visit the institution and be back here for dinner. Mr. St. John will give you all the details and a letter to the matron."

"I will go with you," declared Derry.

"No, Mr. Derry," said Amarilly firmly. "You would be — distracting. I think I could put my mind on it better if I were alone."

"Anyway, I shall meet you when you come home."

"You will both dine with us," said Colette, "and we will enjoy Amarilly's report."

CHAPTER XI

CORYDON BLAKE, resting his head against the plush of the Pullman, was supinely contemplating between half-closed eyes, that seeing yet seemed to see not, the young girl who occupied the section opposite him. Even if she had been conscious of his gaze, there was naught in it to offend. His interest was entirely impersonal and confined to speculations as to what part in the procession of plays parading his fancy he would be most likely to assign her, if he had the opportunity.

"She is young and fresh enough for an ingénue part," he thought, "and yet, she looks as if she had a goodly stock of worldly wisdom."

He knew he was indulging in a vain vagary, for it was quite apparent that she was not an actress. In fact, he couldn't appraise her station in life. Her appearance and all her little belongings so simple and still evi-

dencing refined tastes proclaimed her as not of the working class, and yet there was an indefinable and unmistakeable something which convinced him she had not been exclusively reared. In her converse with conductors, porters and that usually antagonistic person, the news agent, she was pleasant and responsive, not with the gracious aloofness of a grand dame born, or the *noblesse oblige* manner, but with the come-and-go camaraderie that implied a complete understanding of those in the ranks.

"If she were older and less charming, I should say she was a socialist," he decided.

Suddenly he assumed an upright position. The train was running at highest rate of speed and he seemed to sense a happening. Another instant brought a quick jolt — a rocking motion followed by an ominous halt. He went forward and learned that the train had broken in two on a heavy grade. The last portion, consisting of nine sleepers and a diner, had overtaken the day coaches and smashed one of them completely.

He joined the men hurrying to the aid of the victims, climbing over the wreckage from which came the helpless cries of those

buried beneath the mass of timbers. The inevitable, accompanying fire was lending its horror. He was stopped on his merciful way by the sound of a faint little voice saying:

"Can't you get me out?"

The glow of running red fire showed him a little lad tightly wedged in between heavy beams, his terrified, appealing eyes the replica in color and expression of those of the dog he was clasping.

With set teeth and panting breath, Blake lifted, pulled, tugged and strained, making but a slight opening. In the din and confusion his calls for aid met with no response, for the rescuers had gone to the other end of the car. As he was making one more fruitless effort, a man opportunely appeared.

"Some one under there?" he asked.

"Yes; a boy and a dog."

With almost superhuman strength the newcomer lifted the heavy timber, and Blake was enabled to drag the twain from their perilous position.

"I'll take them back into my car, the last one," said Blake, "and then I'll return. They will need help here."

When he came to his coach, the girl in the section opposite his was out on the forward platform looking anxiously about. He swung up on the steps beside her.

"Will you look after this little chap and his dog?" he asked, as he hurried down the aisle.

"Tell me what has happened," she said, following him.

He explained briefly.

"Is the little fellow hurt?"

"I think not. Just frightened. Nothing fell on him. He was pinned in. I never could have saved him alone. Some man with the strength of a lion came along just in time."

"Give him to me," she said, when they had reached her section, "and the dog, too. I don't know which I like best a boy, or a dog. Together they are ideal."

The boy looked up at her with bewildered eyes as he was laid gently in her arms.

"I ain't hurt," he assured her. "Is Pups all right?"

"Yes," she replied, with a smile that had tears back of it, "Pups is all right."

Weary and yet content, his head dropped

down on her shoulder and his eyes closed, but Pups, on guard, kept alert.

In an hour Blake returned, tired and triumphant.

"Not so bad as it might have been," he declared.

"Nothing ever is," she replied.

"We were not so very far from a station. Plenty of helpers and all the doctors came. The fire was quickly put out. Only one killed, though the list of injured is long, I fear."

The girl shuddered and pressed the little form closer to her.

"Have you held him and that cumbersome dog, too, all this time?" he demanded.

"Yes; I couldn't put the boy down, because he is still scared and clings to me. When I tried to release the dog, he uttered such heartrending howls I thought it judicious to bear both my burdens."

"Let me relieve you."

"You'll go to the man again, Dumplings?" she asked. "Yes; of course you will."

"Is his name Dumplings?" asked Blake, looking down at the shrimp-like form.

"It's my name for him."

"What's your other name, my lad?" asked Blake.

"Phillip."

"Phillip what?"

The boy hesitated.

"I guess, Snyder," he said finally.

"Were your parents with you in the car?"

"No. I was making the trip alone. Just me and Pups," he said proudly.

"Where were you going?"

"Nowheres. Just catching a ride."

"Where do your folks live?"

"Haven't got none."

"No relations? No friends?"

"My relations are dead, I guess, and I haven't got any friends except Pups, and you, and her," — looking at the girl, — "and that big man that took me out."

"Where did you get on the train?"

"At the last stop. I was trying to see how far I could ride before they put me off, but the kinductor thought I b'longed to a woman with a lot of kids in front of me. Nobody asked me for any ticket. I hid Pups under the seat. He didn't move once, didjer, Pups?"

Pups made violent denial of any such supposition.

"But whom did you live with?" persisted Blake.

"Didn't live with anybody. I stayed with my last stepdad till he got killed. Kept myself since, and Pups, too."

"How long has your mother been dead?" asked the girl.

"I don't know. A long time."

"How old are you?"

"Seven — going on eight."

"I am afraid," she said, noting the flush that had crept into the wan little face, "that we're talking too much. He looks feverish."

"Maybe he is hurt," said Blake quickly. "I'll see if I can't get hold of one of the doctors."

He deposited the boy and the dog on the seat and left the coach. Presently he returned with a young physician.

"What have you had to eat to-day?" asked the latter, as he took the lad's temperature.

"I had some peanuts this morning," replied the boy after a moment's reflection,

"and a banana, too. But Pups didn't have anything but peanuts, 'cause he didn't like bananas, didjer, Pups?"

Pups beat a vehement tattoo with his long tail, and made frantic passes with his tongue at the little wizened face so close to his.

"And what yesterday?" probed the doctor.

"Nothing. Yes; I had a cup of coffee, and Pups took a bone away from a big bulldog, didn'tjer, Pups?"

Again Pups proudly acknowledged the allegation.

"He wasn't hurt in the accident," diagnosed the doctor, "but he is nearly famished, and so is the dog — or isn't he a dog?" he asked doubtfully. "He looks like he's first cousin to a calf."

Blake had jumped to his feet.

"There's a diner on. Dumplings shall have a banquet."

The doctor laid a restraining hand on his arm and the girl smiled comprehendingly.

"A little warm milk?" she asked.

"Yes; that will be best. Don't let him talk any more. He may have a slight fever for two or three days, but rest and nourishment will put him right."

"What may Pups have?" demanded Blake. "I am hankering to perform commissary duties."

"Anything available," replied the doctor with a grin.

"Then Pups for a spring chicken," declared Blake, as he went away.

"Everyone was so upset, it was difficult to get service," he said, when he returned, bearing a glass of milk and a platter at which Pups sniffed eagerly and knowingly.

The girl held the glass of milk to the boy's colorless lips, and Blake proffered Pups portions of the chicken in large subdivisions. The recoil of surprise when he swallowed the first piece of this unwonted luxury nearly knocked him over, but he came to and devoured the remainder with a voracity which pleased Dumplings more than did the slight appeasing of his own hunger.

"Will it be long before we go on?" asked the girl.

"This train is not going on. I believe the plan is to make up another train on the other side of the wreck and transfer us. There may be quite a wait yet. Do you want to send some telegrams?"

"Maybe I had better. I was expected on an earlier train than this. I will write a message as soon as Dumplings finishes the milk. The doctor said to have him sip it."

Long after Pups had pulverized the sole remaining bone of the chicken, Dumplings had drained the last drop of milk in the glass. She put him down on the seat and spread Blake's top coat over him, Pups immediately becoming sentinel.

She wrote a message and handed it to the man.

"See if it's understandable, please. I have never had occasion to write telegrams."

"'Rev. John Meredith,'" he read, — and then paused.

"I heard him preach once," he said reminiscently, "only time I'd been to church in years. I have met his wife, too," he added, beginning to readjust his preconceptions of Amarilly's social status.

"Your message is very concise and explanatory," he said approvingly, as he started to leave the car.

"Wait, please," she called after him. "I believe I should send another message — to some one who was going to meet me."

She scribbled another and shorter telegram.

"Mr. Derry Phillips," he read, though she hadn't asked him to censor this message.

"Phillips, the artist?" he asked. "Seeing we have so many mutual friends, the Merediths, Phillips and Dumplings, not to mention Pups, hadn't we better introduce ourselves? My name is Corydon Blake."

"Oh! Not *the* Corydon Blake!" she gasped.

"Corydon Blake — without any prefix," he said, a twinkle in his eye.

"The theatrical manager?" she asked unbelievingly.

"Yes; and someway, you suggest the profession to me. You don't look like an actress and yet — have you aspirations?"

"Dear me!" thought Amarilly, "does the scent of the roses — I mean of the mops and suds — hang round me still?"

"No; I haven't had any since I was thirteen years old," she confessed.

"Maybe I can revive them. I wish I had met you then and had the chance to train you for the stage. But won't you let the introduction be mutual? Only your first name was signed to the messages."

"My name is Amarilly Jenkins — not at all suggestive of the stage."

When he returned from the telegraph office, the boy was lying on the seat beside Amarilly, his head in her lap. Pups, in prayerful attitude, rested his nose on Dumplings' breast.

"He was afraid I might go away and leave him," she said to Blake; "but he knows now I wouldn't, don't you, Dumplings?"

The lad looked up trustfully into her eyes.

"You're all right," he murmured, and again went to sleep.

Presently the porter came in and told them the transfer to the other train must be made. Blake carried Dumplings, who was still sleeping, and Amarilly guided Pups.

"He won't wake now until he has had his sleep out," said Amarilly, when they were settled in the other train.

"You seem to understand children."

"I should. I have six brothers and a sister."

Blake looked whimsically down at the pinched features of the boy, and then made a discovery. The little, ragged coat had fallen away and pinned to his coarse, common shirt was a Masonic pin.

"Dumplings thought he had no friends," said Blake, unfastening the pin. "He'll find he has a world of them."

He left the car and on the platform encountered the man who had rescued Dumplings from the wreck.

"Was the boy hurt?" he asked. "I was just coming to look you up."

"Only frightened — and starved. He's asleep now."

"Were his parents hurt?"

"He doesn't own to having a family. A waif. I found this pin on him, so I think we can find friends for him."

"Let me have it," said the man eagerly. "There are a crowd of Masons aboard returning from a conclave. I am one, myself, and the little fellow will be provided for."

"Come in and see him first. Then you can speak more eloquently of him."

"Here's Dumplings' 'Big Man'," Blake announced to Amarilly as he preceded the man into the dimly lighted coach.

Amarilly looked up with a cry of surprise and pleasure.

CHAPTER XII

"MR. COURVILLE! I might have known it would be you!" she cried. "Dumplings has made a hero out of you, and told me how you beat back the fire and lifted big beams piled as high as a house and that weighed a million pounds."

"I don't wonder," said Courville with a shudder, "that it looked mountains high to him. Don't disturb him," he added hastily, as she started to lift Blake's coat from him. "I am going to take up a collection for him."

Presently he returned, his arms clasped about a bundle of boys' clothing.

"Everyone shelled out liberally, when they heard of the lad. The mother of four boys donated these togs, and I have quite a tidy little sum for him. Lucky, because he has no claim against the railroad company. What are you going to do with him?"

"I suppose," said Amarilly, "that the logical thing would be to turn him over to

the Merediths. That is why I made this trip — to hunt up a child for them to adopt. I went to an asylum, but the children were all so appealing I took an option on about twenty, and overstayed my allotted time then. When Dumplings owned up to his kinless state, I thought I would take him to them, but somehow, well — I can't explain, but it seems as if he belonged to me. Of course, as you saved his life, you have the first claim on him."

"I wish that I could feel that I wanted him," said Courville wistfully. "It isn't because I saved his life that he interests me, but because of that little pin — the emblem of a great brotherhood. But what can you do with him?"

"I'll take him out to the farm and leave him there until he's worthy of his name — I mean the one I have given him."

"I must get off, here," said Courville, as they approached a station, "that is, — will there be some one to meet you?"

"Yes," she assured him. "When will you be home?"

"To-morrow. Then we'll talk over the lad's future."

When the train reached its terminal, Blake, bearing Dumplings, Amarilly following, and Pups cavorting ahead, came through the station where Derry was in waiting.

"We were scared stiff, Amarilly, until we received your wires. Oh, halloa, Blake! What have you there? A boy for the St. Johns, Amarilly? How did you ever get him released from the asylum? And 'pon my word, a dog! Does he go with the boy? I hope so. What's a boy without a dog?"

"He isn't an asylum orphan, Mr. Derry," explained Amarilly. "He was in the wreck, and he's all in. I am going to take him out to the farm. If your car is here, will you take us to the interurban station?"

"I say!" remonstrated Blake, "hadn't you better take him to the Merediths — or somewhere for the night? It's too late for you to go out alone on the interurban."

"No," said Amarilly positively. "Please, Mr. Derry."

"Certainly," said Derry cheerfully, neither comprehending nor seeking undue information. "My car is here and we will motor out to Snydikit by moonlight. Give you a lift, Blake?"

But Blake said his hotel was only a short distance from the station and declined the lift. He deposited Dumplings on the back seat, Pups, unurged, occupying the tonneau.

"Good night, Mr. Blake," said Amarilly, as he came to the front of the car where she sat with Derry. "Thank you so much for all your help."

"Good night, Miss Jenkins. Don't fail to let me know how Dumplings thrives."

"I will telephone you. What is your address?"

He handed her his business card, and went to his hotel feeling quite positive that Amarilly was an artist's model and had thus acquired her fine poise.

"Tell me, Amarilly," commanded Derry, when they had gained a comparatively quiet street, "what it all is, and who's who and what's what. It reeled off too speedily for me."

"You're such a comfort, Mr. Derry!" she exclaimed. "You act first and let explanations follow."

"It's the only way to do when trailing you; but proceed with your explanations. They promise to be interesting."

By the time Amarilly had reached the end of her little narrative, they were on the broad highway in the country.

"And so," she concluded, "I'll invest the Masonic fund for his future, and meantime bring him up."

"It seems to me," he said whimsically, "that if you are yearning to 'bring some one up,' there's your houseful of brothers and poor little me. I'd love to have you 'bring me up.'"

"My brothers are mostly brought up. Flam, Milt and Gus are, anyway. Bobby has too much individuality to be brought up. Bud is too near and too dear to Ma to leave her; and as for Iry, — well, I am very fond of Iry, but his hairbreadth escapes would be too strenuous for continuous performance. He has such an affinity for accidents, he'd be a chronic hospital case in town. I can't explain the feeling that I must have Dumplings. It's as if a stray little kitten had fallen at my feet."

"May I be permitted to ask how you are going to provide for this little bag of bones?"

"I'll find a way. Having some one else to support besides myself will make me

hustle more. Nothing like an incentive for that."

"May I help, Amarilly?"

"No; Mr. Derry."

"I can give him his recreations, anyway."

Amarilly made no reply. A rising wind and a fine, flying mist that whipped stingingly across the open car brought a silence that lasted until the murky shadows of the farmhouse came into view.

The car swept up in front of the house and at the first sound of the horn, Mrs. Jenkins' head came out of a window, and she hastened down to unbolt the door.

Derry carried the sleeping Dumplings up to Amarilly's room, and Pups, proficient in the art of slinking, and recognizing a foe to dog-kind in Mrs. Jenkins, made his way up-stairs, unobserved.

When Derry had gone, Amarilly removed the few inadequate garments Dumplings was wearing and laid him down in an improvised bed she had made for him. Then she spied Pups, apologetic, but determined in mien.

"Ma's death on dogs," she thought, "but — well — here, Pups, — curl up on this rug

at the foot of Dumplings' cot, and I'll pretend not to see you."

Pups obeyed shiveringly, but with a furtive, protesting look in his eyes. After Amarilly was in bed, she heard a stealthy step, a swift leap, followed by a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction. Investigating, she found that Pups had burrowed under the cot covers and was snuggled up close to Dumplings, whose little hand even in sleep had felt for and found his guardian.

"Far be it from me," thought Amarilly, "to break ranks and hearts under such conditions."

CHAPTER XIII

"AMARILLY," asked Mrs. Jenkins at breakfast the next morning, "what on airth be you a-goin' to do with that child?"

"Give him a bath as soon as he wakes," replied Amarilly, after a moment's thought. "He's just a little bunch of skin and I want you to feed him for a week or so. By that time he should be in condition to go into town with me."

"Now, Amarilly Jenkins, it seems to me you ain't got so much common sense as you uster hev. I s'pose you had to trade off some of it for eddication. You can't have everything in this world."

"You was findin' it hard sleddin' to take keer of yerself, Amarilly," gently reminded the Boarder.

"You know the matrimonial bureaus say it's cheaper for two to live than for one, and it's lonesome living alone. I think, maybe, I'll get one of those tiny housekeeping flats

for Dumplings and me, only — there's Pups. He's the rub."

"Pups!" demanded Mrs. Jenkins.

"Yes; you must know the worst, Ma. There's a dog goes with Dumplings, and you might as well try to separate the salt from the ocean as to part them."

"Where is the dog now?" she asked sternly.

"He's in bed with Dumplings."

"*In* bed!"

"Yes," laughed Amarilly. "All of him that could get in is. He's quite a large dog; at least, his frame is big, but he made himself into a threadlike form and slunk up behind you last night. He seemed to be wise to your dog-views."

"He stayed there all night?" gasped Mrs. Jenkins faintly.

"He's an unusual dog," replied Amarilly, "but as I was saying, I'll keep house after a fashion when I find a place in town."

"You can take back enough stuff from here to feed you both — three, I mean," said her mother. "It won't hinder you from comin' home Saturdays, will it?"

"No, indeed. Dumplings is undersized, and I can smuggle him through free."

After breakfast Amarilly went down to the meadow with Gus to inspect his herd. When she came back to the house, Dumplings, arrayed in some of his donated clothing, followed by Pups, came running to meet her.

Viewed in the daylight, Dumplings was a little sliver of a lad with eyes that were prominent, not from size, but from tautness of the skin about them. Pups was long and lean and yellow; awkward and ambling; untrimmed as to tail and ears, but with eyes so brown and beautiful, so earnest and appealing as to lift him far above his station in dogdom.

"That kid's been watchin' the medder path every minute since I washed and dressed him," said Mrs. Jenkins, as they came up to the back porch. "Hungry as he was, 'twas all I could do ter git him away from the door long enough to eat."

"Why, Dumplings, you didn't think I'd run away from you, did you?"

"Every one else has," he replied in a matter of fact tone, "'cept Pups. They all run away, or died, or something."

"Now, Dumplings, there are too many

of us to run away and we're too healthy to die right off. You'll always be here or with me from now on."

"Why?" asked Dumplings wonderingly.

"Because I want you."

Dumplings pondered over this situation for a moment.

"Then maybe I'll stay put this time," he said with a sigh. "No one ever wanted me before except father, and he died. Daddy died, too, and Old Man Snyder; but Hugh just went away and so did the others."

"Seems to have had a lot of hist'ry for one so young," observed the Boarder, who with the rest of the family had come up to view the newcomers.

Attention was diverted from Dumplings by the mad home-rush of Pups, who had been indulging in a merry-go-round with some hens. Lily Rose gave a little cry of distress as he neared her pet aster bed, but with a hound-like leap he cleared it, landing ignominiously in the midst of some upturned milk-pans.

"My!" exclaimed Mrs. Jenkins, when the din had subsided, "that Pups looks like he belonged in a skelerton museum."

Dumplings seemed to sense the fact that his beloved Pups wasn't appearing at his best.

"Pups," he said anxiously, "say your prayers."

Instantly Pups' forefeet sought the milk-bench, and with eyes devoutly uprolled, he gave three exhortant barks.

"Amen!" came in tone of military command from the little master, and Pups forthwith returned to all fours. He responded with alacrity to the enthusiastic encore of the delighted children, who proceeded to reward him with scraps from the breakfast table.

"He sure can eat," observed Mrs. Jenkins. "We won't need no garbage can while he's here. I hope Dumplings gits as good an appertite. Whenever he goes to smile, like he done when he seen you comin', I'm afeered his face'll crack."

"I've got muscle," boasted Dumplings, doubling his slender arm."

"That's what he has," admired the Boarder as he felt the proffered member. "All muscle; not a farthin' o' fat."

"We'll get 'em both fed up," said Lily Rose.

"Can I have something to eat now?" asked Dumplings.

"Not until ten o'clock," decreed Amarilly. "Then you can have a glass of milk and a cookie."

"Let him have it now," pleaded Cory. "Are you dreadful hungry?" she asked, turning to him sympathetically.

"No;" he answered. "I'm not hungry at all."

"Then why eat?" asked Amarilly.

"I want to eat while the eating's good," he explained. "Maybe I won't find another place where there's so much to eat, so I'd like to get filled up to the top."

"That's the stuff," said the delighted Boarder.

"You're not a camel, or a cold storage," laughed Amarilly, "so you'll not eat until it's time."

Dumplings appeared to be perfectly acquiescent to this arrangement and suddenly asked:

"Where's the big man, ma'am?"

"He's coming to-day to see you, but you can call me Amarilly just as my other brothers do."

"Am I going to be your brother?"

"Certainly you are."

"And she'll be some sister," Bud informed him.

"Come out to the barnyard with me and see all the little chickens and things, Dumplings," said Amarilly.

"Huh! There ith no little chickenth thith time of year," scoffed Iry, who resented this invasion of a "little brother."

Dumplings' wonder and delight at the novelty of farmyard inmates brought a faint misgiving to Amarilly as to the wisdom of her plan for his upbringing.

"Dumplings," she asked abruptly, "where would you rather live, here on the farm where there are chickens and lambs and children to play with and everything to eat, or in a city with just me?"

"I don't mind," he said, "so long as I'm with you and Pups."

"Oh, Dumplings! No one ever liked me as well as that before. Sit down here under the shade of this apple tree and tell me all you can remember about yourself."

When Dumplings had exhausted the contents of his meagre memory, Amarilly sighed and gazed plaintively away over the fields.

"Back in the old days, we used to think we had troubles," she thought. "Maybe we did; but not tragedies. There are much worse things than poverty after all; but it's a plain case of 'ignorance is bliss' with Dumplings."

"Just in time," exclaimed Lily Rose, as they came into the house. "Long distance is calling."

She found Courville on the line.

"I can't get home before evening," he said, "but I am sending the little fellow out some playthings by Jerry. Is he all right?"

"Let him talk to you. Come here, Dumplings and talk to the Big Man."

"Hullo, Big Man!" shouted Dumplings lustily.

The response was a little delayed.

"Halloa, Little Man! How do you feel?"

"Bully!"

"That's good. I am sending you out some playthings. You must share them with Iry and Ceely."

"You bet you!" assured Dumplings readily.

Jerry Pryne soon arrived with a wonderful assortment of toys which the children were loth to leave even for dinner.

"I don't see where that child puts his food," said Mrs. Jenkins, watching Dumplings. "He don't seem to have no inerds. He ought to have a nap now, Amarilly, after all he's went through."

"Huh! I ain't a baby!" protested the boy.

"You'll look like one if you don't hurry up and grow, and sleeping will help. Suppose we go upstairs and you can look at pictures in your new books until you are sleepy," coaxed Amarilly.

"Yes; and then perhaps that critter'll lay down if you do," said Mrs. Jenkins. "He's so lively since he's been fed up that he's tearin' everything up by the roots. Look at him scarin' them hens!"

"Come, Pups," called Dumplings.

Pups responded with an alacrity that made havoc in the barnyard community, scattering shrieking chickens in all directions. He paused en route only long enough to push a couple of kittens from a saucer of milk which he disposed of with three laps of his tongue.

"Amarilly," exclaimed Mrs. Jenkins pityingly, "what kind of a dog is he?"

"Seems to be an assorted lot," commented the Boarder."

"He's just dog," said Dumplings indignantly.

"And a darling one," agreed Amarilly. "Please, Pups, don't be so free with your tongue."

Upstairs, when Dumplings was removing his blouse, Amarilly shivered at sight of his emaciated little body.

"I am thankful there are no bruises," she thought. "No one ever struck you or beat you, did they?" she asked him fearfully.

"No; 'cept Mother. She used to get mad and slap me and then she'd give me chocolates. It made Hugh laugh. He said she'd cut a fellow's throat and then offer to sew it up for him."

Amarilly's laugh was slightly hysterical.

"Of all Dumplings' knights — or his mother's — I believe Hugh was the flower," she thought. "Well, I remember when I was Dumplings' age, my sympathies were always with the villain in the play."

When Dumplings was comfortably settled in his cot, she began to read to him a little

story from one of his new books. Glancing up presently, she saw that he was evidently not listening.

"I don't like that," he said disdainfully. "Say, can't you get a paper and read me about a baseball game?"

"Bless you, Dumplings! You're a boy after my own heart."

She found a newspaper Derry had left for the Boarder and read the account of a game between the Tigers and the Red Sox.

"That's the stuff!" he approved, when she had finished. "I slid into the park most every game this summer. Read some more."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," she replied. "Shut your eyes now and try to sleep."

He obeyed, but in a moment his eyes and mouth opened simultaneously.

"Say, Amarilly, what makes the Big Man so good to me?"

"If I tell you, Dumplings, will you promise you won't open your eyes or speak again until you have slept?"

"Sure," he replied.

"It's because your father was a Mason."

"Nope," he said decidedly. "He wasn't. There wasn't any of them masons. Hugh

was on the road. Daddy kept a store. Old Man Snyder did odd jobs and sharpened scissors. I can't remember what the rest of them did, but none of 'em digged cellars like Buck's father did."

Amarilly explained to him as well as she could the meaning of the term. The difficulty of conveying to his limited understanding the definition of Masonry was somewhat lessened by the fact that he and "some other kids" had once belonged to a secret society.

"That was the kind of a Mason your father was and that the Big Man is; so that's what makes him so interested in you."

"How did he find out my father was one of them?" he asked.

"Because of that little pin we found on your shirt. He showed it to everyone on the train, and all those that were Masons and wore the same kind of a pin gave some money to help take care of you. One Mason's wife gave you all these nice clothes."

"Did you bring me out here and keep me because I had on that pin?"

"No," she replied quickly. "That made no difference to me. I told you I just *wanted* you."

Dumplings closed his eyes and lay so quiet that she was stealing from the room, when he said:

"It ain't any use, Amarilly. I ain't sleepy."

"Lie still, and you'll rest anyway."

She went downstairs and when she came back to call him to supper, he was staring at the ceiling and there were two red spots on his cheeks that made her fearful of fever.

He came down to supper, but didn't eat with his former avidity, nor did he talk very much.

After the dishes were washed, the Jenkins family, with the exception of Amarilly, went to the Grange Hall to witness an entertainment in which "Flammy's girl" was to take part.

"I guess the Big Man didn't come home after all," Amarilly told Dumplings, "but you'll see him to-morrow. I think you had better go to bed."

"All right," agreed Dumplings apathetically, as he and Pups followed her upstairs.

"Dumplings," she asked hesitatingly when he was undressed, "don't you ever say a prayer before you go to bed?"

"I used to," said Dumplings contentedly, "but I don't have to any more."

"Why not?"

"'Cause Pups says 'em for both of us. Prayers, Pups!"

Pups performed the dual devotions, and Dumplings crept into his cot.

"I don't know how to preach," thought Amarilly, in answer to the protest of her conscience. "I'll get Mr. St. John to set him right."

"Dumplings," she remonstrated, as Pups prepared to follow his young master to cover, "I had to tease Ma to let Pups stay up here in the room, even. She draws the line at his getting into bed with you."

"Down, Pups," commanded Dumplings sadly but emphatically.

Pups looked at him steadily and cocked one ear in wistful inquiry.

"Did he always sleep with you?" asked Amarilly, weakening.

"Ever since I had him. You see he came to me on a cold night last spring when I had begun to keep myself. He was littler then and I kept him warm at night. Then, when he got bigger, he kept me warm."

"Up, Pups!" said Amarilly decisively.

With alacrity Pups accepted his restoration to duty and was "up" and under cover.

"Oh, Pups!" sighed Amarilly, as she bestowed a caress on boy and dog alike. "There is no love so loyal as that of a dog for his master."

An hour later Courville arrived.

"Couldn't make it sooner," he said. "Are you all alone here?"

"Except Dumplings and Pups. They are in bed."

"Hasn't he any relatives? Just a little outcast?"

"Yes, poor Dumplings! His life seems to have been a series of stepfathers. Such a pitiful little tale it sounded, only he doesn't know it's pitiful. I hope the memory of it fades before he is old enough to realize it."

"Tell it to me."

"I'll repeat it just as he told it to me and you can interpret. He said he and his mother ran away one night on a train and went to live with Hugh, and then his father died. After a while Hugh went away and never came back. So they left the nice hotel and when they had spent all their money, mother

married daddy and they lived in a little house. Daddy died and there was someone else and he went away. Mother died and he and his last daddy lived together for awhile and then daddy left him with a poor lady. When daddy stopped sending money he had to sell papers to pay her for his food. Then one day the poor lady went away to live with her son. She was going to put Dumplings in an orphan asylum, but Old Man Snyder, who sharpened scissors, let him come to live with him. When he died, Dumplings ran away and has been sleeping in a piano box in an alley with Pups to keep him warm. He sold papers for his 'eats.'"

By the end of this recital Courville's long hand was shading his face. Amarilly made pretence of going up to see if Dumplings was all right. She found him awake.

"Big Man down there?" he asked, sitting up excitedly, and Pups following suit.

"Yes; shall I bring him up to see you?"

A compelling little hand clutched at her skirts as she started to leave.

"Put out the light. I want to tell him something, and it's easier telling things in the dark."

Amarilly extinguished the lamp and went down to deliver Dumplings' request.

Courville seemed reluctant to comply.

"I suppose I must, if the little fellow wants me, but you know, Amarilly, why it hurts me even to look at a boy."

"I know," she said gently, "but I think maybe if you were accustomed to seeing one around constantly, after the first pang it would be easier and you might be happier."

"No," he said resolutely.

He followed her slowly up the stairs.

"You won't have to watch your step," she said. "The moonlight makes a path most of the way."

He crossed the big room to the little cot which was in the shadow.

"Well, Dumplings, old man," he said, taking the small hand in his, "how are you coming?"

The little hand tightened about his, and Pups, who had been alert to see what manner of man the newcomer was, manifested his approval by laying his head upon the pillow and relaxing to reposeful state.

"Say!" said a small voice huskily, "you know that pin what was in my shirt?"

"Yes, Dumplings. I'm going to give it back to you to keep until you are a man. You must be very careful of it."

"'Twa'n't dad's nor none of them's. Bill Hawks swiped it off a man's coat, and I won it from him matching pennies."

There was an instant's silence.

"Dumplings, I envy you," said Courville, laughing softly. "You have squared yourself from the charge of appearing as an impostor, but I never can. I won't be able to trace those deluded Masons who opened their hearts and pockets so generously."

"Never mind," consoled Amarilly cheerfully. "They were giving for the cause and they have laid up treasures for themselves in Heaven."

"I'll donate the money I collected to some needy widows and orphans of Masons, and put an equal sum to Dumplings' credit."

"She said," continued Dumplings, indicating Amarilly, "that you gave me all my toys and things on account of that pin. You can take them back. They ain't spoiled any."

Courville laid his hand lightly on the little flushed face.

"Oh, Dumplings," he said in remonstrance.

"*She* don't care because I didn't have a Mason for a dad!" declared Dumplings, with a little catch in his tone. "She *wants* me."

"So do I, Dumplings," said Courville, snatching him from the cot and holding him close. "I thought it was on account of that little pin that I cared for you, but I see it wasn't. It is on account of a little boy I once knew — a little boy who died. There are two people now who claim possession of your small person. You'll have to decide which one shall have you, Amarilly or the 'Big Man.'"

Dumplings' small heart thrilled at the recollection of the strong arms that had pulled him from the wreck, and he was feeling now how good it was to rest in those same arms again, but something drew him to the girl who had *wanted* him. He didn't hesitate long. His mind was quite made up.

"You can both have me," he said cheerfully. "I want you both."

Courville laughed — a little, soft, musical laugh that thrilled Amarilly.

"Then, you must mind us both. Will you shut your eyes and go to sleep now that you know we both want you?"

"Yes."

"Then, good night, son."

Courville felt two little arms about his neck and a soft mouth pressed to his. Pups whined wistfully and made longing laps at space with his tongue.

When they were downstairs in the living room, again, Amarilly noted a new, odd expression in Courville's dark eyes.

"There is so much in life for me to learn," thought Amarilly. "I don't seem to have come in contact before with heart emotions. People as poor as we had no time for sensations other than purely physical ones — like hunger and cold and fear. Even when Bud was sick, we had to work so hard we couldn't find time to think about it."

"What's his other name?" asked Courville suddenly.

"Phillip."

"I mean his last name."

"He really doesn't know. He seems to have taken on everyone's surname. 'Daddy's' name was Truax. He can't remember his father's name, and Hugh didn't seem to possess one. Snyder was the last one Dumplings adopted."

"We must find out. It's only fair to him and to his parents. Does he know the 'poor lady's ' name?"

"Ellis," recalled Amarilly, "and she went to live with her son, Napoleon."

"That's some data to start with anyway. I'll put a detective to work. Didn't the child have any belongings?"

"He said he once had a little box of keepsakes, but probably they were in 'Old Man Snyder's' possession."

"We'll unearth them for a clue."

"He must have come of good stock," said Amarilly. "That was fine in him to confess about the pin. And as much as I want him, I think you would be happier if you had him with you."

Something in his expression as he gazed at her disconcerted Amarilly.

"Suppose," he said after a moment, "we don't decide that just at present. I have to go West day after to-morrow on a business trip and I may be away for four or five months. Keep Dumplings in trust for me until my return, anyway. I will look after the financial part of the guardianship. Have you decided where you will live?"

"I suppose the farm would be the best place for him — in a sense, but I couldn't go back and forth every day. I fear no apartment would admit both Dumplings and Pups. If I might split the difference between city and country! Why, I can! There's the Marsdens at Oakridge. They have a straggling little house with a wing which they never use. There would be a garden for Dumplings to play in — a nice school near and Miss Roxy to look after them while I am away. She adores children and dogs."

"The very place. I'll rent it —"

"No," refused Amarilly. "I've agreed to let you pay Dumplings' expenses, but you can't include mine. We'll divide the rent and the living expenses."

"Amarilly," began Courville softly, but he was interrupted by the entrance of Gus and Cory.

"The show wasn't very good," said the latter, "so we slipped out."

"You look — grown-up, Cory," said Courville, inspecting her approvingly.

"It's my clothes," she explained proudly. "Amarilly made me this dress and fixed my hair different."

CHAPTER XIV

ON the outskirts of the suburban town of Oakridge was a straggling, little, white cottage nestling in a little rosebud garden bordered by a little green hedge. This was the home of Sydney Marsden and his sister, Miss Roxy.

For sundry reasons such as being impracticable, expensive to make, infringement on other inventors' domain and a general lack of interest on the part of an unappreciative public, Marsden's patents were not remunerative; on the contrary they were as expensive as excess baggage. At the psychological moment something in his inventions fell short of expectations. Perhaps it was because he tacked in so many directions that he sailed in none.

Miss Roxy was not enthusiastic over her brother's patents. She vaguely associated them with uncanny, incomprehensible things like the moving of tables, or planchette writing.

One by one she had gradually removed to a storeroom the pieces of furniture and domestic utensils he had improvised, replacing them by more conventional substitutes.

Under the drain of patent rights, Sydney Marsden's patrimony had slowly and surely dwindled, a fact that did not disturb his absent-minded serenity. His more practical sister, however, eagerly grasped at the opportunity to rent the little wing of the cottage to Amarilly.

"It isn't furnished, though, except for curtains and carpets," she explained.

"I can copy the Japanese style of furnishing," laughed Amarilly. "A screen and a tall vase, say, for the sitting-room, or, maybe we can find some second hand things."

"There's the patent furniture," suggested Miss Roxy doubtfully.

"What is that?" asked Amarilly hopefully.

Miss Roxy led the way to the storeroom, and Sydney Marsden followed to give a demonstration of his exhibits. Amarilly was enthusiastic and immediately rented the "junk" as Miss Roxy called the portable furniture, and all hands, including the de-

lighted Dumplings, proceeded to make the transfer.

"It's lucky they are made after the accordion style," said Amarilly, "or we could never have got them through the doorways."

When Amarilly, Dumplings and Pups had taken possession of their new quarters, the Merediths and Derry Phillips were invited to a house warming.

Awaiting the arrival of her guests, Amarilly stood in the doorway, her eyes shining like those of a little girl giving her first party.

"Haven't you furnished yet?" asked Derry wonderingly; as he gazed about the scantily appointed room.

Dumplings chuckled and began to touch springs and push buttons. A couch came down and unfolded. Some boards against a wall became chairs. Something resembling a breadboard expanded, developed legs and asserted itself as a table.

"Goodness!" cried Colette. "I feel as if I were in a conjuror's house. I shall be in a state of suspended breath for fear this come-and-go furniture will close in, or double up, and then where shall we all be, I should like to know?"

Amarilly led the way to the other diminutive rooms.

"Guess where my bed is?" said Dumplings.

"I guess that you have none," replied Derry, "unless it's that thing in the corner that looks like a closet shelf."

Dumplings proudly manipulated the "thing in the corner" until it came down, doubled in size. A mattress appeared, seemingly from oblivion.

"I believe you had it up your sleeve," declared Derry.

When they returned to the sitting-room, Amarilly introduced them to another marvel. It was one of those cool autumn nights that suddenly slip in a frost and the furnace in the Marsden cottage was evidently turned on by calendar instead of by barometer. She pressed a button on a small object of stove-like shape and instantly a pipe shot up after the manner of moving picture cartoons and conveniently connected with a stovepipe hole. Some patent kindling wood was broken up and placed in the stove. The fuel was added and presently a most agreeable warmth came forth.

"Mr. Marsden must be a wizard," declared

John Meredith. "Hasn't he marketed any of these miracles?"

"No," said Amarilly, the sober little expression that was so apt to steal over her features quickly intensifying. "You see none of them has been perfected. They have shown off beautifully this evening, but they don't always respond so agreeably, and Dumplings so loves to work them that I expect I shall come home some night and find them all collapsed."

"He won't need any playthings," remarked Meredith, smiling.

"It's like a fairy story house," said Dumplings.

"It sure is," agreed Derry. "Better than Meccano stuff. I am quite crazy over it, myself."

"I was nearly crazy, too," said Amarilly, "while I was learning to manipulate them. I tried to light the dishwasher instead of the cooker, and once I touched the button supposed to let down a table. Instantly it delivered a bed that knocked poor Pups over."

"I shouldn't dare touch anything," said Colette. "I might get a steamboat or a

house and lot on my hands. Why not make out a card index?"

"Speaking of Pups," said Derry, "I want to renew my acquaintance with him."

"I'll bring him in," volunteered Dumplings.

"I didn't like the partnership arrangement with the Corners man," admitted Colette when Dumplings had left the room, "but Derry said to wait until I saw Dumplings and then I would understand things. Why didn't you give him to us, Amarilly?"

"My answer is, Pups. Wait until you see him. You and Mr. St. John would never have opened your doors to him."

"No! indeed, no!" murmured Colette, as she avoided Pups' forward rush.

"Why don't you have Mr. Marsden invent something that will reduce Pups to cottage size?" asked Derry.

"I don't want Pups any different," said Dumplings seriously.

"Of course not," agreed Amarilly emphatically.

"What is Pups' real name?" asked John Meredith.

"Just Pups."

"I admit the appropriateness of the plural,"

he said, also passing on Pups' advances. "He is certainly equal to six of the single tense ordinary style."

"Now," said Amarilly, "we will have a little patent supper."

Dumplings quickly made the table into dining size while Amarilly busied herself in the kitchenette, which was provided with a "cooker", a sub-patent for eliminating odors, and various other housekeeping devices. She soon prepared and served a meal, after which she allowed Derry and Dumplings to operate the dishwasher.

"I haven't had such fun," declared the former, "since I used to live in a playhouse. I shall be your most constant caller."

"Speaking of callers," said Colette, "John plans to call on a superannuated minister who lives in this vicinity. We'll motor to his house and pick you up, Mr. Phillips, on our return."

"Has Courville gone West?" asked Derry abruptly, when the Merediths had left.

"Yes; he left sooner than he had planned, and he didn't have an opportunity to see Dumplings save for a few moments the night after Dumplings came to us."

"And it was dark, then," supplemented

Dumplings. "I wish my Big Man would hurry home."

"Won't I do for a Big Man?" asked Derry.

"You aren't as big as my Big Man," said Dumplings positively.

"Remember, Mr. Derry," reminded Amarilly, "if you were where Dumplings was that awful night, and some one pulled you out, he'd look very much magnified to your vision. No, Dumplings, dear, he isn't the big man; he's the big boy, mostly."

"I like that!" quoth Derry, "but a big boy can manage to give you a fine time, Dumps. We'll have some rides in the big car you rode in the night you came to the farm, only you were asleep. There's one final baseball game yet, and all the football games to follow. We'll take them in."

"That'll be great!" cried Dumplings excitedly, "I like you, Mr. —"

"You may call me Mr. Derry as your near sister does. What's your other name besides Dumplings?"

"Louis Phillip Snyder."

"Why, Dumplings!" said Amarilly in surprise. "That is the first time I have heard the 'Louis' part of your name."

"Nobody ever called me 'Louis' except father. Mother said that was why she called me 'Phillip.'"

"He's said it!" observed Derry whimsically. "A whole family history, or tragedy, in that little instance."

"Dumplings must go to bed now," said Amarilly.

"I'll come in and say good night when you are tucked in your knock-down bed," promised Derry.

"Ready!" called Dumplings presently from his room.

"Goodness, Dumps!" said Derry sitting down beside the little bed, "you look like a Christmas stocking early on the evening Santa Claus comes."

"He'll look as full as one on Christmas morning," prophesied Amarilly, "if Miss Roxy keeps on 'piecing' him between meals."

Further conversation was prevented by Pups at prayer.

"Some trick," applauded Derry.

"It isn't a trick," said Amarilly. "It's getting to be a regular habit, and unlike humans all his prayers are answered. Even

Ma has fallen under his power. When he upset a pan of milk set for cream, she snatched the broomstick, but Pups immediately assumed his attitude of devotion and she stayed her hand."

"Come here, Pups," commanded Derry. "All right, only come with less allegro movement. There! now listen to me. My prayer has not been answered. Will you pray for me, if I prompt you?"

"He won't do it for no one but me," said Dumplings, "or else for something for himself."

"That is very selfish in him," said Derry.

"I'll pray for you, Mr. Derry," offered Dumplings, getting out of bed and coming up to him. "I haven't said any prayers for a long time, but I guess I could."

"It must be a silent prayer, Dumps," said Derry, whispering something in the boy's ear, "and you are not to tell anyone —"

"Except God," reminded Dumplings gravely. "I'll tell him right now."

"I hope it's a good prayer," said Amarilly dubiously."

"It's a dandy," assured Dumplings, "and I shall say it every night."

"While you are praying," said Amarilly, "remember to ask to be a good boy."

"But I am, Amarilly. Bill Hawks said I was too darned good."

Derry's laugh was discouraging to further religious instruction, so Amarilly ordered him to return to the sitting-room.

"What are you going to do this winter?" Amarilly asked him, when they were back in the living-room. "Have you any particular picture in mind?"

"I've a beautiful one sketched out in my mind's eye, if I can only materialize it."

"Tell it to me, Mr. Derry."

"It might fade in the telling. You know when you tell anything it loses force. Some plants flourish best in the shade."

It was not with her plans, Dumplings' future, nor Mr. Derry's picture that Amarilly's mind was occupied that night, but with the problem of her wardrobe for the coming winter.

"It will be trying to come back to Cinderella clothes, and my little last year's things are not in line," she thought ruefully, "but then, there are the grand furs Mr. Derry sent me for Christmas, and furs cover a multitude of defects."

CHAPTER XV

"NOW that I have acquired a home and a family," thought Amarilly, "I shall have to see to their up-keep. I'll apply to Mr. Blake first."

Her name won instant admission to his office.

"The Dumplings boy still coming on?" he asked.

"Yes; sleeping and eating overtime."

"And Pups?"

"The same. We have set up housekeeping at Oakridge, Dumplings, Pups and I. I had to be near the city," she added, answering his look of surprise, "because I have to earn our living."

"What do you do?" he asked interestedly.

"I have been typewriting a play for Mr. Lyle."

"His plays lack something," commented Blake. "I have read two."

"Unfortunately I tried to tell him what they lacked."

"Good! I am sure you could give him pointers on plays or anything. I wasn't wrong in associating you with the stage. You could act, I feel sure, Miss Jenkins. Suppose you let me place you?"

"Thank you, Mr. Blake, but I do not want to be an actress. I should like your opinion, though, on what I told Mr. Lyle."

Briefly she gave him a synopsis of Lyle's play and her suggestions as to alterations.

"You have the right idea," he said.

"I don't mean to plagiarize, but you know how one thing suggests another, and his play — the play he might have written — gave me an idea. May I tell that to you, too?"

"Certainly," he said with polite resignation.

He listened with a half amused attention as she gave him a concise outline of her plot.

"It has possibilities," he conceded, "but I claim the paving to a certain place is made of plots instead of good intentions. Work away on it, though. It will keep you out of mischief. Where did you get all your ideas about plays? Were your parents on the stage?"

"No," replied Amarilly. "When I was

thirteen — at the age I told you I had stage aspirations — I helped scrub at Barlow's Theatre."

"That was a good way to get local shading; but I didn't know that theatres were ever scrubbed. Barlow's must have featured it."

"I wonder," she asked, "if you happen to know of some one who writes plays and would like a typist? I promise to make no more gratuitous criticisms. The thought of Dumplings and our little home will guard my speech."

"You can't support yourself, the boy and Pups by typing plays. You had better dump Dumplings."

"He will be no expense to me, because the man who pulled him from the wreck is paying for his maintenance."

"I saw that Masonic emblem had got in its work."

"There's a little story in connection with the emblem."

He listened with great relish to her account of the way Dumplings had come into possession of the pin.

"I felt," she said, rising to go, "that Dumplings would give me open sesame here."

"It wasn't the boy who opened my door to you. It was something in you — the dramatic instinct, maybe. The same intangible influence that the little pin exerted on the Big Man."

"I trust," said Amarilly, "that I have more claim on that nameless something than Dumplings has on the pin."

"Well, you see, it made no difference with Dumplings' hero, when he found the kid wasn't eligible to the brotherhood. Who knows but what one of Dumplings' ancestors was a third degreer; and I still believe that the blood of a brilliant actress of long ago fame flows in your veins. I have a feeling that some day you will return to your birthright. When you are tired of typing and dabbling with plays, you'll strike your gait. In the meantime, to keep you in touch with the stage, I am going to send you a pass to my theatre for the season."

"Oh, Mr. Blake! How can I ever thank you for all you have done for me?"

"By promising to come to me when you are ready for the footlights?"

"I surely shall, — if ever I am ready."

"I'll keep you in mind," he promised.

He looked after her regretfully, as she left the office.

"It isn't her looks or her figure—though both are good—that might put her on top. It's that powerful little poise she has. There is no charm to equal it."

"There's one iron in the fire," reflected Amarilly as she turned into a side street, "but before it gets hot, I may be out of funds, so I must find a quicker fire. I wish I could stir up a nice little blaze for Mr. Marsden's cold irons. I don't see how, even with Miss Roxy's thrift and sifting of ashes, they can manage."

She paused before the window of a dairy lunch to look at the white-capped, white-aproned girl engaged in baking pancakes.

"I might do that," she thought. "There doesn't seem to be much else I can qualify for."

When she boarded the Oakridge car, she found part of a daily newspaper in the one vacant seat.

"The sheet most familiar to me!" she thought, with a wry little smile. "How I've pored over the 'Help Wanted, Male and Female!' This is only the 'miscellaneous' page. Oh!"

In her jubilance she nearly cried aloud. Hastily she rang the bell, got off at the next crossing and turned into one of the side streets that are fast coming into business competition with the uptown avenues. She scanned the signs until she came to Belgrave's Bazaar. She entered.

It was the time of day when trade slackens, and the proprietor was easing off from the day's drudgery by engaging his head clerk in a little confidential chat.

"That advertisement," he was saying, "simply let down the bars to all the freaks in town."

"I hope I may prove the exception," said Amarilly, stepping up to him.

"Another!" he said resignedly. "Well, what is *your* proposition?"

Quickly and animatedly Amarilly revealed the inspiration she had conceived while reading the liner.

"You're a winner!" he exclaimed, when she had finished the outline of her plan. "Cash or check?"

"Cash, please," she said, her heart fluttering, as he handed her fifty dollars, the amount offered in the advertisement for the "best idea."

"And if the thing pans out," he continued, "as I think it will, I'll pay you a salary and commission on all sales. When can you begin?"

"A week from to-day," she promised.

After a little parley, their agreement as to salary and commission was put in "black and white", and Amarilly again started for Oakridge.

"I feel as if I had rubbed Aladdin's lamp so hard I might put it out!" she thought.

"I have a wonderful secret to tell you," she said excitedly to Sydney Marsden.

"It won't be a secret if you tell it," he remarked. "A secret is something only one person knows."

"But you can invent a way to keep it. I want to go into partnership with you on one of your patents."

His interest was at once enlisted by the magical word "patent", but he was disappointed and skeptical when he learned which patent she had selected.

"That was only a whim — a mere trifle," he expostulated. "There are others —"

"It's trifles like this that take. You will see that it will make us a nice little income.

There are just two stipulations I want to make."

"As many as you like."

"One is, that only you and I are to know what my occupation is. I will tell my family, friends and Miss Roxy merely that I have a 'commercial position.' And the other condition is, that your share of the profits won't be entirely used for patents, but that three-fourths of it will be deposited in the bank toward an assured future for you and Miss Roxy."

Sydney Marsden was willing to agree to anything that would rid him of her presence for the time being, and permit him to return to the evolution of his latest invention.

CHAPTER XVI

IT was the day before the one day that makes all others of the year seem insignificant.

Amarilly and Dumplings were on the train en route for home. The latter was making the acquaintance of a friendly brakeman, and Amarilly was taking inventory of the past three months, which had been a most happy and prosperous period. Her business and the care of the little home had so occupied her time that her efforts in a dramatic direction had been but desultory. She sighed as she recalled her ambitions.

"Moneymaking," she speculated, "seems to curb all ambition to achieve in any but a mercenary way, and then Dumplings takes up so much of my time. How did Ma ever manage with such a houseful! But Dumplings, Pups and I are very happy, and so is Miss Roxy. Happiness comes first, always."

Her eyes strayed to the little fellow, and

something in their gaze brought him quickly to her.

"Gee, Amarilly, it's going to be a swell Christmas! The brakeman told me a lot more about Santa Claus. He says he can go some — faster than a telegram."

"It will be a merry Christmas, Dumplings, and we shall have many more of them."

"You are sure I won't ever have to go away, Amarilly?"

She had had this query propounded to her many a time. "Poor Dumplings!" she thought. "He has bivouacked so much, he can't believe in a home station."

"Certainly, I am sure," she again told him. "Even the Big Man shall not take you from me now."

Dumplings sighed.

"Wouldn't you like to have him come and live with us, Amarilly?"

Amarilly flushed. Courville had asked for frequent reports of Dumplings' welfare. His replies thereto had been prompt and personal, with a new little note in them of late that had piqued her interest, and yet had been somewhat agitating.

"He couldn't do that, Dumplings."

"I wish he was going to be with us for Christmas, anyway, and Mr. Derry, too."

"Mr. Derry had so many demands upon him," she said regretfully, "that he couldn't come."

It had been the one little cloud in her sky of blue that she hadn't ventured to share the secret of her undertaking with Derry. Her explanation of "commercial position" had entirely satisfied the family and had greatly impressed them. John Meredith had been somewhat solicitous when he beheld the evidences of Amarilly's affluence, but his wife assured him that Amarilly had told her that she was a "demonstrator of a new device."

"But why the secrecy?" he asked perplexedly.

"It's in some way connected with the Marsden patents," replied Colette, "and it is probably not to be divulged until it is on the market. I told you it would be impossible for Amarilly to walk in a conventional path of commerce. She'd naturally verge off into some unbeaten track."

Corydon Blake had telephoned Amarilly to call at his office, as he had found something for her in a "typewriting way."

"It was very kind in you to remember," she said gratefully, when she answered the summons, "but at present I am engaged in something that is very lucrative."

"What is it?" he asked wonderingly.

"It's an invention in which I have invested, and it is paying good dividends."

"It's different from most inventions then," he said ruefully. "I never yet invested in one that brought me returns."

It had not been so easy to deflect Derry from further probing as to the nature of her enterprise.

"I think, Amarilly," he said reproachfully, "that you should let me in on this mysterious business."

"He would so disapprove," she thought, "that I should feel it my duty to give it up, and I must keep on for the Marsdens' sake. There is nothing like telling the truth to mislead."

So with a little tug of conscience she told him she was employed in a toy shop.

"Amarilly," he replied abruptly, "I know perfectly well that there is no toy shop in the city that pays its clerks the salary you must be drawing. I know what you are doing for

Snydikit in the way of repairs and stock. And you certainly have all the outward and visible signs of a fair-sized pay check."

"I am extravagant in the way of clothes," she acknowledged, "but that's your fault. Ever since the day you gave me a dollar to purchase velvet hair ribbons, I've had to dress up to that expenditure."

"Amarilly, you can't evade me! You are not a clerk in a toy shop. I wish I could be sure that you were."

"I didn't say I was a clerk — that I sold toys," she replied. "I — I demonstrate them. Please, Mr. Derry, be patient, until I can tell you more. It's a perfectly respectable place and a perfectly respectable business."

"Heavens, Amarilly!" he exclaimed, his forebodings quickened by the word "demonstrate", "you don't wash dishes in the store, do you, to show off that crazy dishwasher?"

"I'd break too many dishes if I did," she said laughing. "It is putting the Marsdens on their financial feet, and when that is accomplished, I will tell you all."

After that conversation, Derry didn't refer to the subject, but Amarilly was uncomfort-

ably conscious of just a suspicion of constraint between them.

The train slowed up. With a start Amarilly came back from her reflections.

"This is where we get off, Dumplings."

The Boarder was waiting, and when Pups had been released from the baggage car where his time had passed in unavailing supplications to be unleashed, they all got into the big sleigh. Far down the road they could see the warm welcome that crackling birch-log fires and the lights of many lamps were sending forth from all the windows of the farmhouse. When they drove up to the door, the Jenkins family came out to greet them.

"Hurry in!" entreated Cory. "Supper is waiting."

"'Twill take an ox team to hold the young ones back much longer," said Mrs. Jenkins.

Dumplings looked wonderingly at the living-room festooned with pine and red berries.

"Those berries ain't good to eat," Cory informed him. "They're holly berries."

"Are they what make holidays?" asked Dumplings.

"How beautifully the room is trimmed," exclaimed Amarilly, when the laughter had subsided.

"Thank you," said Derry, coming into view.

"Oh, Mr. Derry!" she exclaimed delightedly. "You said you weren't coming!"

"I said nothing of the kind. I said I had an engagement of long standing. This was the engagement. Ages ago Lily Rose asked me to come and help trim the house and tree. You don't suppose I'd miss my first real Christmas tree? It's some tree, too."

"Oh, hurry and eat," urged Cory. "No one's seen the tree 'cept Milt and Lily Rose and Mr. Derry."

"It will be Dumplings' first tree, too," said Amarilly.

"I'll never fergit *our* first tree," said Mrs. Jenkins reflectively. "We only had one evergreen when we come out here, and we didn't want to cut it down. 'Twas a mild winter, so we jest had our celebratin' outside. We hung that tree full of cranberry and popcorn strings and snow instead of cotton. Didn't need no lights, cause the moon and stars and snow lit it. We all put on our

arctics and mittins and bundled up. We had an orful good time."

"That was the real thing," declared Derry. "But there isn't to be any Fletcherizing at the supper table, I see."

"We'll need a ramrod for Iry," said the Boarder, watching the little fellow bolt his food.

"I'll take a look in," said Derry, as he left the table, "and see if Santa Claus has come."

"Amarilly," exclaimed Dumplings, "the brakeman told me Santa Claus never came until midnight!"

"He meant in the city," explained the ever-ready Amarilly. "He comes to the country first so he can get to the city by midnight."

"He's coming," whispered Derry mysteriously.

"All aboard for the parlor!" shouted the Boarder.

There was a grand rush for the folding doors, which slid back and revealed a gigantic tree, Christmas-clad in all the glory of gold and silver, red and white.

The whoops of the children were stilled by the sound of the jangling of bells, and Santa Claus, alias Milton, entered, booted and bearded.

Ceely clung to her mother in an ecstasy of timid delight, while Iry went up to him fearlessly.

Amarilly had been waiting expectantly to see the effect upon Dumplings, but instead of being overwhelmed with joy, he was puckering his features in perplexity.

"Isn't it grand, Dumplings, dear?" she asked.

"I've seen a tree like this before, Amarilly, but I can't remember whether it was at home, father's home, or maybe Hugh —"

He shook his head helplessly, but Santa Claus was speaking.

"Here's Amarilly's present first of all."

Bud stepped in front of the tree, lifted his head and voice and poured forth the plaintive beauty of *Der Tannenbaum.* His old richness and purity of tone had soared triumphantly above the rocks of voice-changing period.

"Oh, Bud!" cried Amarilly, when the last note had died away. "It's the loveliest present I could have! Are you sure it's safe to sing now?"

"Mr. Derry took me to Maurel the other day and he said I could begin again, though he can't tell yet whether my voice is going

to be strong. Mr. Derry planned this for a surprise for you."

"That is like you, Mr. Derry," began Amarilly gratefully, but Dumplings grasped her hand.

"Amarilly," he said, a little break in his voice, "I know now, it was at my real home — my own home — and we had a tree like this, and father sang that song. It all came back when I heard Bud."

"This is not the time for tears," growled Santa Claus. "I come to make folks glad. Here's a present for Ceely."

Ceely speedily lost her fear when he held out a French-featured doll. There were so many Jenkins and so many gifts that the distribution took some time. Pups was bountifully provided for with a box of allegrettis from Amarilly, a collar from Derry, and nuts, candies and cake from the children. As he was bidden to pray for each and every presentation, he added much to the holiday hilarity.

Derry's gifts, from a silk dress for Mrs. Jenkins to a magically fitted doll-house for Ceely, were many and costly, and Amarilly began to feel troubled at what she should

receive. She gave a cry of pleasure at the portrait of Dumplings he had painted for her.

"I kept awfully still while he painted, didn't I, Mr. Derry? He gave it to Santa Claus to bring to you."

"And isn't Dumps the dandy to keep a secret?" added Derry.

"I never have told about the prayer, either," supplemented Dumplings.

When the presents were finally all distributed and Santa Claus had gone to the barn, Derry, who had promised to look in late at some festivities in town, took his departure, having promptly accepted Mrs. Jenkins' invitation to the Christmas dinner on the morrow.

"Oh, dear, ith's all over," mourned Iry, when his mother was scrubbing his sticky face and hands in the kitchen.

"Be thankful," adjured his mother, "that it's over without your being burnt up. I've put you out five times to-night, and I believe you're a-smokin' yet. Between haulin' you out from under them candles and pushin' that Pups loose from the decoratings, I'm all wore out. Where's that fool dog now?"

Answering in person, Pups galloped gaily

forth from the parlor. He had evidently been indulging in an uninterrupted, solitary bout with the tree, for he was festooned with strings of pink popcorn; a ring of cranberries coquettishly adorned his left ear; his tail was bound round with silver tinsel and he had put one of his front feet through a tarlatan stocking. From his mouth dangled the remains of a Christmas angel. A string of chimes had caught on his collar and jangled a melody. Surely none ever had a merrier Christmas than the one Pups was now celebrating.

Mrs. Jenkins opened the outside door.

"Git!" she commanded in military tone.

Pups obeyed, and sounds of revelry by night were wafted from without.

"We were going to save all the trimmings for next Christmas," regretted Cory. "But I am glad Pups is having such a good time."

When Bud, Amarilly and Dumplings were alone in the living room, the latter asked Bud to sing his Christmas tree song once more.

Bud's tones came soft, throaty and subdued. Dumplings' musical ear was keen and by the end of the first verse he was able to join in. Then there was added from the

next room a rich baritone, to which Amarilly listened in wonder and admiration.

Dumplings trembled, and ceased singing. In the doorway stood a man to whom he rushed with a glad little cry of —

"Father, oh, father!"

Amarilly's heart beat quickly as she watched Courville gathering the little form to him.

"You are my father, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes; I only just found it out and hurried to you, my son."

"And you came for my Christmas. You didn't die, like mother said."

"Mother was mistaken," said Courville, wincing slightly. "Father thought *you* were dead, Louis."

"I was most dead when you pulled me out of the fire, father."

Courville's eyes, which were devouring the face of his small son, finally met Amarilly's bewildered gaze.

"Wasn't it wonderful," she said faintly — "that you should have been the one to save his life! How did you find out?"

"We just succeeded in tracing Mrs. Ellis, and the boy's possessions included a letter to his mother, her picture, and some trinkets.

If I only had looked at him that night of the wreck, — but you know it was dark, and you had him covered up when I was in the car, and there was no light in the room when I saw him upstairs, here."

"You wouldn't have recognized him. A child changes so between the ages of four and seven, and he now doesn't look at all as he did at the time of the wreck."

"I should have known him," said Courville emphatically. "But, how did you know me, son?"

"I knew when I heard you sing the Christmas tree song. You won't die again, father?"

"No, Louis, you are going home with me to the Corners."

"That grand place? And Amarilly, too?"

"I hope," he said earnestly, without looking toward Amarilly, "that we can persuade her to do so."

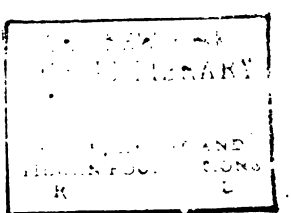
To her relief, the family, whom Bud had corralled from all parts of the house, now came in to hear the wonderful news.

"Are we going home to-night, father?" asked Dumplings, when it had all been told again.

"Your pa's goin' to stay here to-night with



" How did you know me, son? " *Page 178.*


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you," said Mrs. Jenkins hospitably. "Yes," she insisted, answering his faint demur, "this place's like the street cars, always room for one more. And Dumplings orter be in bed this minute."

"No!" protested the boy.

"Not if father undresses you and stays with you till you are asleep?" asked Courville.

Dumplings consented eagerly, and Amarilly felt with a pang that he had been readily weaned from her care.

"Blood's thicker than water, Amarilly," said Mrs. Jenkins, reading her daughter's thoughts, as Courville and Dumplings, followed by Pups, went upstairs and the rest of the household dispersed.

"I suppose so," sighed Amarilly, "but I don't see how I am going to get along without Dumplings. I almost wish I had never had him at all."

"You orter be ashamed of yerself, Amarilly. You should be glad you had the chance to do something fer Mr. Courville when he's been so good to all us."

"I know it," said Amarilly wearily. "I'm tired after all this excitement. I believe I'll go to bed."

Lily Rose, who had shown the guests up to the "speer room", came in.

"He wants you to be sure and wait up fer him, Amarilly," she said significantly, "and I guess we'd better clear the track," she added to Mrs. Jenkins, as she went into the kitchen.

Mrs. Jenkins gazed anxiously at Amarilly for a moment.

"You wa'nt never yet a dodger, Amarilly. You might jest as well face it, fust as last. I see 'twas bound to come."

"I can't decide now," said Amarilly. "I must have more time."

"It don't never take no time to tell whether you want a thing or not."

"It isn't a question of wanting," said Amarilly. "It's a question of what I ought to do. He's had such a sad life. His wife was a hot-headed Italian girl. She was on the stage before he married her. They didn't get on together very well and she ran away and took Dumplings just to hurt his father. She didn't care for the child."

"But what's that got to do with you?"

"He's had such a lonely life, and — I do want Dumplings."

"But don't quite want his dad; not real bad, anyway. Courville has got his kid back and that orter make up to him for losing a good fer nothin' woman. Nobody can't hev everything. You know well enough you don't love him and that orter settle it."

"Ought it really?" asked Amarilly eagerly.

"Sure, it orter."

"I might learn to love him, maybe."

"Love don't come from no learnin'. You jest do or you don't. You'd allers keer most fer Dumplings, and then his pa'd be jealous and so unhappy that mos' likely he'd take Dumplings and run away. Runnin' away seems to run in his family. Sayin' 'no' may be hard, but it's the best thing to do."

"You make things so simple," said Amarilly, brightening. "I don't know anyone so wise."

"We allers think folks who tell us to do what we want to do is wise. Now, Amarilly, you say, 'no', and you stick to your no."

With this admonition, Mrs. Jenkins left the room, and Amarilly remained waiting in apprehension.

"I've lost Dumplings," she sighed. "I'll just hide this portrait of him, or his father will be wanting that, too."

Soon Courville appeared, but the ordeal was not as trying as she had expected it would be. His voice and manner were full of appeal, but he was not insistent after she had refused him.

"I knew you didn't love me," he said gravely, "but I was selfish enough to hope you would say yes on the boy's account."

It occurred to Amarilly, as she went up to bed, that the Christmas to which she had so expectantly looked forward was beginning most disastrously.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN Amarilly came to breakfast the next morning, Dumplings, sitting at the table next to his father, looked up at her with shining eyes.

"I am not afraid that father will ever leave me, Amarilly, 'cause I belong to him."

"I told you it was going to be 'some Christmas'," she replied with a brave attempt at cheerfulness.

"We had a tree and everything, father," explained Dumplings.

"So I judged," said Courville, "when I met Pups in holiday attire coming down the lane last night."

"It'll be a hull year afore another," said Iry disconsolately. "Don't theem ath if I could wait."

"It won't be for me," said Amarilly. "Mr. Marsden and Aunt Roxy are going to have their Christmas to-night, so I could be with them."

"And I won't be there," mourned Dumplings.

"But after breakfast," said his father jealously, "you will have another Christmas, too. I met Santa Claus, and he gave me presents for five children."

"Cory, Iry, Ceely and me. Who's the fifth?" asked Dumplings.

"Amarilly," he replied with a short laugh.

Lily Rose brightened perceptibly at Courville's look and tone.

"Say, Flammy," she asked briskly, "you're goin' to eat Christmas dinner with Almy, ain't you?"

"Yes; I am going to drive over about eleven."

"Take me with you. I want to see Almy's presents. I'll get the mornin' work did by then, and Amarilly's goin' to do my share with the dinner."

"Sure I'll take you. But how'll you get back?"

"I'll ketch a ride. Wouldn't hurt none if I had to walk, it's so mild."

Amarilly tried to feign an interest in the new lot of toys Courville distributed and in the gold mesh bag he had bought for Dump-

lings to give to her. Cory was in a little eighth heaven of bliss when he presented her with a wrist watch.

"It's the first grown-up present I ever had," she cried joyfully, "and the very nicest."

"I sent you a present, father, out west," said Dumplings, "I earned the money to buy it with."

"It will come back," said Courville. "Thank you, Louis."

It gave Amarilly a little thrust every time Courville addressed his son as "Louis."

"Even his name will be a memory to me," she thought.

In the meantime Lily Rose had gone with Flamingus, but she displayed far more interest in looking out the window at the road than she did in Almy's gifts.

"There comes Mr. Derry," she cried. "How lucky. Go, flag him, Flammy, while I git on my things."

"I am glad you saw me," said Derry, when Lily Rose was in the car at his side.

"I was watchin' fer you," she confessed. "I wanted to meet you and break the news; so drive slow."

"What news?" he asked quickly. "Not bad news, I hope, on Christmas day!"

"Amarilly takes it like it was, but I'm tickled to tears, though I dassent say so to no one but you. Arter you went last night, the Man at the Corners come."

The car swayed slightly.

"Why did he come back so soon?" he demanded.

"For them — Amarilly and Dumplings."

The car stopped.

"What do you mean, Lily Rose?"

Lily Rose was a lover of romance, and she was now getting more thrills than she did from the novels she devoured in her scant leisure hours. She would have reveled in prolonging the excitement and deferring her climax, but she saw that Derry would not permit any "continued in our next" style of narrative.

"Well, you see, it turns out that the Man at the Corners is Dumplings' pa."

"The deuce he is!" exclaimed Derry. "And a married man!"

"A widower. None of the folks around here knew nothing about him, but he told Amarilly all about hisself. His wife was an

Eyetalian and she run away and took the kid, and told him his pa was dead and told the Man at the Corners the kid was dead — treated 'em both the same, you see. The Man at the Corners put detectives to work and they jest found out who was who. It was all like a play last night!"

"What did you mean by saying he had come for Amarillly?"

"He went upstairs to stay with the kid till he was asleep, and he asked me fer to tell Amarilly to set up till he come down. I knowed he was gone on her the first time he ever seen her."

"Did she wait up for him?"

"Yes; and he asked her to marry him and be Dumplings' ma. He told Mrs. Jenkins all about it. It would be a fine home for her, and she loves Dumplings and Pups, but —"

Seeing the look of apprehension in Derry's eyes, she mercifully hastened her climax.

"She refused him."

Derry uttered a gasp of relief.

"She come pretty nigh doing it on Dumplings' account. She's awful blue to-day at the thought of losing him and Pups. I come out a-purpose to meet you and tell you, so

if she didn't act nateral, you'd know why it was. She's purty close-mouthed, you know."

"You did right, Lily Rose," he said approvingly. "It is good news. Good for Dumplings and his father, and I am mighty glad Amarilly is relieved of the care of the boy. It was too much for her. Thank you for telling me. Will you promise always to tell me everything I should know about Amarilly?"

She promised eagerly, adding: "I can't help but feel sorry fer him, but then he can wait fer Cory."

When they reached the farm, Derry found Amarilly in the kitchen, her sleeves caught up to her elbows, a studio apron covering her from throat to ankles, and her cheeks flushed not entirely by reason of proximity to the bake-oven. She had just picked up the rolling pin as Derry entered.

"Please, mum, don't brandish that weapon at me so formidably! Somehow, Amarilly, I feel that we are meeting on the old-time ground to-day. I've been somewhat in awe of you in your rôle of college graduate and little mother to Dumps. I think it's the

apron that takes down the barrier, and makes you seem like a little girl again."

She smiled faintly and began emptying the flour sifter.

"Say, Amarilly, I'm awfully hungry! Have you only just rolled out the oven things? If I have to wait for them to bake, I'll ask for a handout right now."

"Everything is just about ready to come out of the oven. I am only clearing up."

"'Reddin' up', you mean," he said mischievously.

Amarilly's nerves were tight-strung to-day. At any other time she would have enjoyed the allusion to old days. Her flush deepened and a hurt, sensitive look came into her eyes.

Two quick strides brought him to her.

"Amarilly," he said tenderly, "I know you've just lost your youngest child, but he's got a father to look after him, while I — well, I haven't anyone in the wide world to look after me, unless you will. Won't you adopt me in Dumplings' place — and be nice to me on this day of days — nice like you used to be? Remember we were born on the same day of the year and if I were ten years younger we'd be twins."

There was a shadow of relenting beneath her downcast lashes.

"You might wish me a Merry Christmas anyway," he continued. "I am going to have one in spite of Dumps, and Dumps' dad, and your aloofness."

The lashes lifted.

"The merriest of all Christmases to you, Mr. Derry," she said softly.

He put his arm quickly about her, and the distance narrowed until there was no barrier of space between her cheek and his lips.

The little light kiss seemed to sweeten the atmosphere, and a subtle tenderness was breathed in the shy silence that followed.

"Amarilly, I smell things burnin'!" exclaimed Mrs. Jenkins, rushing into the kitchen and opening the oven door. "I come jest in time."

"Oh, Mr. Derry!" cried Dumplings, who, with Cory, had followed Mrs. Jenkins, "you're all covered with flour."

Cory gave an audible and vulgar snicker.

"You're mistaken, Dumps," laughed Derry, swinging the boy to his shoulder. "I'm all covered with happiness."

"Go into the settin'-room," commanded

Mrs. Jenkins, "and all set to table. I'm a-goin' to dish up, and I don't want even you in the way, Amarilly."

"I want to congratulate you," said Derry, transferring Dumplings to his father's shoulder, as they met in the little hallway. "He's a boy to be proud of."

His appreciation of Dumplings was so heartily spoken that Courville's usual air of frigidity toward the artist thawed perceptibly.

"I wish to thank you for all the good times he says you have given him," he replied.

"Then let me give him some more. I never had the real fine points of baseball revealed until we went to a game together. Oh, say, Amarilly!" he called to her, as he saw her about to slip off her long apron, "leave it on, please, for 'old sake's sake'!"

In the sitting-room the table was set for fourteen and festively adorned with holly and green ribbons. Twin turkeys were placed in front of the Boarder and Milton, who vigorously began a carving contest.

"We uster git double deals in a different way," chuckled the Boarder. "Remember the double decker, Amarilly? This plate's

fer you, Mr. Derry, and Milt's first goes to Mr. Courville."

"Now fall right to and eat," said Mrs. Jenkins.

"It looks too good to eat in a hurry," commented Derry. "I want to sit and gloat over mine. From now on I shall be strong for Christmas."

"Amarilly," announced Iry, "ith goin' to have the betht Chrithmath of any of uth. Thee ith goin' to have another to-night at the Marthdenth."

"She hasn't anything on me," declared Derry. "I am going to be there, too."

"I didn't know —" began Amarilly in surprise.

"I have to go, to take Miss Roxy a five-pound box of chocolates and a string of blue beads."

"How dear in you to remember that she adores candy! She was wishing that she might have one frivolous present. She always receives those bazaar-like things, so easy to give and too useful to use."

"I have some magic tools for Marsden to work out his wonderful ideas with, and well, naturally, they will ask me to stay."

"Father's going to send them something from me," said Dumplings, surreptitiously smuggling a piece of turkey to Pups, concealed beneath the table.

"Does your housekeeper like dogs?" asked the alert Mrs. Jenkins of Courville, as she heard the quick snap of Pups' jaws.

"Not any more than she does boys," replied Courville cheerfully; "but she'll have to endure both with a good grace, or seek another place."

Soon after dinner, Derry proposed that he and Amarilly start for Oakridge. He divined that it would be easier for her to leave Dumplings than to see him depart with his father.

"Goodbye, Amarilly," said the little fellow cheerily. "Father says I can come over here every time you are home."

"Goodbye, Dumplings."

She kissed him, quickly turning to Pups' caressing overtures.

"I suppose," she said wistfully, as she and Derry were motoring to town, "that Dumplings has always been such a little transient that new environments come as a matter of course to him. I never saw any one with such an aptitude for transplanting."

"He'll take root now, Amarilly, because he's returning to his native soil. It was too much responsibility for you, anyhow."

"He and Pups took every moment of my spare time," she said with a sigh. "I must find something else to be absorbed in, now."

"We will talk of that later."

CHAPTER XVIII

MISS Roxy derived a childish glow of the old-time Christmas spirit from her presents of beads and chocolates. Her brother could hardly wait for the close of festivities to try his new tools, but Amarilly was plainly perturbed when Derry handed her a small package.

"But you gave me such a beautiful present last night," she protested.

"That was from Dumplings. This is your real Christmas present from me."

"Oh, Mr. Derry, I can't!" she exclaimed, when she had opened the little case and beheld a string of beautiful pearls.

"Yes, you can. They look better with red hair than any other jewels. If you knew the time I spent trying to find just the ones I wanted!"

"I suppose," meditated Amarilly, "that to one born to wealth, the monetary value of an article is trivial. He probably thought no more of the price than he would if he had

been buying flowers or candy, and — I suppose it's very plebeian not to be able to rise above the dollars and cents of life."

She forced herself to say simply and naturally:

"They are beautiful, Mr. Derry, and I thank you very much."

"That's like the Amarilly I used to know," he said, fastening the necklace for her.

Then Marsden placed his gift, in an enormous box, on the table near her.

"Even after the royal gift you've just received," he said, "I am not ashamed to present mine, because I know it's something you want very much."

Wonderingly she lifted the cover. One glance, and she gave a cry of pleasure.

"It's too good to be true!" she cried, clasping her arms about his shoulder. "It's Pandora's own box with incentive added to hope."

"Open it up again, and let me see," besought Derry curiously, and with just a shade of resentment in his voice.

"Not now," she denied. "It's a secret. Some day you shall see what it has wrought, I hope."

"When?"

"Maybe by next September."

"For the first time in my life, I shall personify patience. But, put on your wraps. We must be off."

"Off where?" she demanded.

"There is still another Christmas awaiting you. I promised Colette I would bring you there for the night."

"I wondered why I hadn't heard from her. What a progressive Christmas this is!"

"So far," he said, as they were on their way to the Merediths, "this has been the nicest Christmas I ever had, and I hope the last of it, the part yet to come, will be the best of all."

When they came up the rectory steps, he took a latchkey from his pocket.

"Are you one of the family now?" asked Amarilly, as he inserted the key in the lock.

"I am — for to-night. You see the Merediths have gone to some church affair — Colette couldn't dodge it — and the servants have a night off; so she gave me a key and told me to entertain you until she returned."

"This is great!" he exclaimed, as they came into the library with its soft lights and glowing

fire. "Sit down here by me, Amarilly, on this divan built for two. I'll pull it nearer the fireplace. There! Now let me ask you if you remember me telling you on that autumn night when we came to your house-warming, that I had a beautiful picture sketched in my mind that I was waiting to develop?"

"Yes; I've often thought of it, Mr. Derry, and wondered what the subject was, and if you had started it yet."

"You are the subject, Amarilly. I tried to tell you in Paris and on the way to Dover, but those confounded girls were always all over us like puppies. That first Sunday at the farm I tried again, but Courville *en passant* and Bobby's call for supper forbade. Afterwards there was always Dumplings and your mysterious work. To make a long story short, Amarilly, I love you and want you to be my wife."

Amarilly's eyes grew grave and unfathomable.

"No, Mr. Derry. When you saw me at Cherbourg, you thought you loved me, just because you were surprised to see me grown up and —"

"I always loved you, Amarilly, I believe,

and I didn't wait until you came over there to find it out. Your letters for the last two years you were in college opened my eyes to the way I cared for you."

"Wait until you meet the right girl, Mr. Derry. Then you'll know the difference between love and fancy."

"What does a girl just out of college know about love! I'm sure I've met many types of girls and —"

"Not the right type — not yet, Mr. Derry."

"What kind of a girl have you in mind to wish on me, Amarilly?"

"I don't know — only, she mustn't be like me."

"Well, now, you have youth, health, good looks, brains, and what will discount all these, a big, true, generous, loyal heart. It seems to me that is a combination a man doesn't meet with very often."

"You used to say you liked my frankness. Mr. Derry, I — don't want to be your wife."

"I know you are not in love with me, Amarilly, but give me the chance to make you care —"

"No; please, Mr. Derry."

"Amarilly, I know a beauty spot on the

cliffs above the river drive. You can go to work in earnest, if you will, at making it the combination of home and studio I'd like to build there."

"If we could do just what we wanted to," thought Amarilly wistfully, "how happy we would be, maybe. Life seems to be just giving up one thing after another. I have had to give up Dumplings and now, Mr. Derry."

"Please, Amarilly!"

"No, Mr. Derry," she replied a little sadly, "I am not the one to make a home for you."

"You will find I am a patient waiter, Amarilly."

When the Merediths came in, and Colette's ready eyes saw the wistfulness in Amarilly's expression, and the disappointed but determined lines about Derry's mouth, she drew correct conclusions. At the little supper awaiting them in the dining room, Amarilly told of Dumplings' change of fortune.

"How lucky you didn't give him to us!" exclaimed Colette, "but I am glad he is off your hands."

"Haven't you found a child yet?" asked Amarilly.

"No, and I am beginning to be discouraged.

I'll not ask you to make selections again, Amarilly. When I think of that appalling line of freckled boys with slits for eyes and mouths that you picked, I shudder. They looked like the pictures of children I used to draw when I was a child."

"I didn't select them from a beauty standpoint," defended Amarilly.

"That was perfectly evident; but tell me what you drew for Christmas. I saw those pearls you are wearing before you did."

Amarilly flushed at the expressive look in Colette's dancing eyes and began quickly to enumerate her presents. Then Derry reluctantly announced that he must take his departure.

"See him out, Amarilly," directed Colette, "and don't forget to take the key away from him."

"You hoped," said Amarilly slowly, when they were in the hall, "that this would be the nicest part of Christmas. I am — sorry —"

"In spite of your resolute little 'no', it *has* been the nicest. Won't you make it still nicer and bestow a little hearts-ease? You remember, Amarilly, how I came to get covered with flour to-day?"

He watched the pink in her cheeks deepen, before he resumed: "That was only a fleeting mirage of one. Please, a real one, now, because it's Christmas and because I haven't anyone else in the world to give me one, and because you denied me what I want most of anything in the world."

Slowly and in spite of the knowledge that she was not acting wisely, she lifted her face to his. All that she wouldn't let him tell her was in the meeting of their lips.

"Did you get the key?" asked Colette innocently, when Amarilly returned to the library.

"What? the key — oh, no!" she replied confusedly.

"It's late," said Colette, foregoing her tantalizing laugh as she gazed into Amarilly's eyes. "We had better go upstairs now."

"I shouldn't have let him," acknowledged Amarilly, when she was alone in her room, remembering with a little shiver the luminous look in his eyes when she had run away from him; "but it was my goodbye to him, only he didn't know it. It was my goodbye to any thought of ever consenting to what he asked."

CHAPTER XIX

ON a week-end visit to the farm in the latter part of March, Amarilly was greeted by encouraging news from the Boarder.

"The railroad people are goin' to settle soon. They've been waitin' all this time for Old Maid Hankins to come off her high priced perch. She's jest gittin' ready to light."

"I had about given up hope for help from that quarter," commented Amarilly, "but you know it was understood that I am not to share in the sale of the right of way."

"We ain't goin' to hev no sech understandin'. We kin be as sot as you, Amarilly. Not one on us, not even Milt, will touch a penny of your part. Lily Rose and me will bank for Ceely. Flam is goin' to build his house. Milt's got an option on some town lots. You'll spile all our enjoyment in the money if you don't take yourn."

"All right! I'll be good," promised Amarilly blithely.

"Money's coming in too fast to be healthy," she reflected soberly, as she was on her way back to town Monday morning. "I wonder if the Marsdens and I are not financially able to declare ourselves? My withdrawal wouldn't lessen their profits, now the thing is so well established. I really enjoy doing it, and yet I can see that the secrecy is widening little wedges between me and — those I care for. If there were only one person I could confide in and get a reassuring indorsement from! But they would all be prejudiced — if they knew. In the old days I would have had faith in my own opinion and kept right on; but a little knowledge is — upsetting and makes cowards of us all. I wonder what Mr. Corydon Blake would think! Somehow, I feel he would be the most lenient. I think Mr. St. John would be troubled. Mrs. St. John's love of being amused might overcome her scruples. Brenda would say I was crazy, and Mr. Derry — oh, there's the rub! Once, he would have been delighted, but now I fancy he would be opposed. Dumplings would adore it. Dumplings appreciates the joy in earning money, but his father — he hasn't forgiven me for refusing, nor himself

for having invited refusal. And yet Mr. Derry didn't cherish a grudge! Brenda says it shows a man is selfish and egotistical if he resents a refusal. Brenda must have been born wordly-wise. How I should like to spread my cards on the table and see if I am right in what the various verdicts will be. I know! I can find out without revealing my identity."

The result of her several speculations was the writing of the four following letters:

"Dear Mr. Meredith:

"As one of your flock from afar, I should like your advice as to the business in which I am engaged. I am (or was, until I engaged in this pursuit) poor, but by reason of having received educational advantages I am, perhaps, capable of a different walk in life, one more elevating but not so remunerative.

"If you will visit Belgrave's Bazaar on —th St. you will learn my occupation. You will not be permitted to address me, but a note left with the proprietor will be delivered to me. I should value your opinion."

"My dear Mr. Blake:

"If you can spare the time, will you give the 'attraction at Belgrave's Bazaar' a casual survey

and give me your opinion as to my means of earning a living. All the world's a stage to you, so you will not judge from a social standpoint. I'd like to know whether I qualify as vaudeville, movie or legitimate artist. A note to Mr. Belgrave will be delivered to me."

"Dear Mr. Courville:

"When you were in Belgrave's Bazaar the other day with your little son, I heard you give your name and address to a clerk for the mailing of your purchases. I am taking the liberty of requesting your views as to my method of earning a livelihood.

"If you have a daughter, and her circumstances should some day become like mine, would you want her to pursue the vocation in which I am there engaged?

"I am not communicating as a means of gaining your acquaintance. I truly desire your impersonal opinion. You can hand or mail your reply to Mr. Belgrave."

"Dear Mr. Derry," she wrote, and then with a little exclamation of dismay and amusement, she tossed the sheet aside and began anew.

"Dear Mr. Phillips:

"I know you by reputation as a great artist, and I should like an artist's opinion as to my occu-

pation — whether it is suitable for a young girl. Although it is as public a pursuit, perhaps, as that of an actress, still if you will visit Belgrave's Bazaar, you will see that I, unlike an actress, am as inaccessible to the public as though I were in a convent. Should you take the trouble to reply, please do so through Mr. Belgrave."

She drew a little scared sigh when she had posted these letters.

"It's a regulation school-girl trick, just like some of the crazy things we did at school, but maybe it will show where I am at, if only they 'bite' and answer. I think they will. People like to answer letters of a kind they are not in the habit of receiving. Mr. St. John will think it his duty to do so. Mr. Blake will be on the lookout for a new 'type.' Mr. Courville has so much leisure time he will be glad of something to do, and Mr. Derry — well, he is kindly disposed toward those in the humbler walks of life."

Throughout the next day Amarilly kept her eyes demurely dropped, for she was secretly conscious of "some one near."

On the second day among the letters handed to her by Mr. Belgrave were three in recognized hand-writing.

She waited with little thrills of expectancy for the seclusion of her apartment at Oakridge before reading the responses to her communications.

She first opened the one from John Meredith.

"My dear young lady:

"All labor is honorable and respectable. Your occupation affords innocent amusement and diversion to little children and some of their elders, too; but, could it not be followed by one who has not received the advantages of education and training, and are you not therefore keeping some less favored person out of employment?

"If you have the qualities to rise above your position, do you not owe it to yourself and to your teachers to aim at a higher mark? to develop and utilize your capabilities along bigger lines? Remember that only lack of courage and loss of faith in yourself can keep you from your chosen goal."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Amarilly. "I got just what I expected — a little sermon that aimed straight at the bull's eye — and hit it."

She picked up an inclosure that had fallen from the envelope.

"A bit of lovely leaven," she thought as she read:

"I am your pastor's wife and amanuensis, and so slip in this note. Of course he is right — he always is — but it must be a lot of fun and — who *is* your dressmaker?"

Courville's letter was brief, laconic and characteristic:

"Every one to his own taste, and if you like your vocation, or avocation, it is no one's business. As to your personal question, I most certainly would not desire my daughter to do what you are doing; but, as I said before, it's a matter of taste."

"No," thought Amarilly a little bitterly. "You, and so many like you, would prefer to have your daughter bent-backed and near-blind from poring over ledger or typewriter and rusting out in hall bedrooms, trying to eke out a meagre-mealed life and save one dollar sixty-nine a month towards avoiding the poor-house in her oldest old age. Now for Corydon Blake's. I'll get something sane and practical from his."

She gave a little startled gasp as she read:

"My dear Miss Amarilly Jenkins:

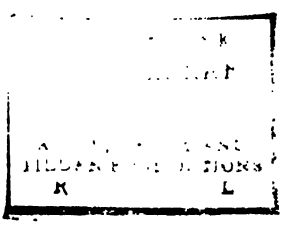
"You see I am on! I'm too old a stager to be deceived by even so clever and beautiful a make-

up as yours. You couldn't conceal that little turn of your head and shoulders that you have. But you've proved me right in thinking that the stage is your native heath. You are perfect in your ingénue part and could shine in other rôles. I should think the stage would be more enticing than this."

"It isn't," she reflected, as she folded the letter "because I have been behind the scenes and I know what a struggle it is. I am choosing the easiest way. But I never dreamed of his or any one's identifying me. Mr. Derry must have [illegible], and is so disapproving me [illegible]er!"



It was not smoke that soon issued from the pipe, but beautiful sparkling bubbles. *Page 211.*



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CHAPTER XX

THE next morning, as was her daily custom, Amarilly entered Belgrave's Bazaar by neither the front nor back entrance, but by means of a concealed doorway between the Bazaar and an adjoining store, thus eluding a possible reporter.

In a little dressing-room, she changed her tailored suit for a marvellous gown, sheer in texture and of the hues that glisten in a rainbow when viewed through a summer shower. A wig of bright yellow hair, from which stray tendrils shaded her face partially from view, was next adjusted. To-day, made apprehensive by Corydon Blake's discovery, she added a disguising touch here and there from a make-up box.

Then she walked into the big show window of the bazaar, seated herself and raised to her lips a common clay pipe. It was not smoke, however, that soon issued from the pipe, but beautiful, sparkling bubbles that danced upon the floor, as she gracefully

flicked them into space. Finally there was such an accumulation that a man came and removed them. Even then they still remained intact.

In the window, which was artistically draped in colors to match those of her dress and the bubbles, were various placards: "Buy the bubbles that never burst." "Come in and get dreams for your pipes." "We give rebate on all bubbles returned."

Children pushed their way inside the bazaar to the counter where a thriving trade was being conducted in the pipe and bubble business. The space near the display window was roped off and screens were so arranged that no one could obtain a view of the bubble blower.

Amarilly's heart skipped a beat when about eleven o'clock she heard Derry Phillips' voice on the other side of the screen:

"Mr. Belgrave," he said, "I came in to ask a favor."

"Ask anything," replied Belgrave jocosely, "except the name of the young lady in the window."

"I am an artist," replied Derry, "and I wish to know if I may rent that beautiful

gown the young lady is wearing. If I could have it on Sundays, say, when she is not wearing it, I should like to paint it. Will you ask her? In the meantime I will buy one of those wonderful pipes. It was the dream of my young life to blow bubbles that would not burst."

"Mr. Belgrave," said Amarilly in a muffled voice, yielding to an imprudent but uncontrollable impulse, "come here, please."

The proprietor promptly responded.

"I'd like to interview this man about renting the dress. And I like his wanting to blow bubbles. Please bring him here, but, of course don't tell him who I am."

Belgrave joined Derry at the pipe counter and, after learning his name, brought him into the window.

"Mr. Phillips, the artist," he announced.

She acknowledged the semi-introduction by a slight inclination of the head, but did not look up or desist from bubble blowing.

"Little Miss Bubbles," began Derry.

"I like that name!" she said in a high-pitched voice. "I shall keep it."

"Then, please remember that I am your godfather. I should like very much to paint

that wonderful gown, and your golden hair — and the bubbles."

"And me, too?"

"I cannot tell until I see your face. Won't you look up for a moment?"

"I can't stop now," she said, resuming her pursuit.

"You know," he said, after a moment's silence, a tender note in his voice, "you might wear a golden wig and keep your face from me and totally disguise your voice, but you couldn't change your hands, Amarilly. I should have known them anywhere, and who but Sydney Marsden could have devised such bubbles!"

She looked up in dismay.

"Mr. Derry! I never dreamed you would recognize me. When I heard your voice, I couldn't resist the impulse to talk to you. Did you suspect from my note?"

"No; but I determined that whoever the girl might be who wrote to me, she should receive her answer in person. But have you been to luncheon yet?"

"No; it's early, you know."

"Let's have one together now. I want to talk to you in a less public place."

"I'll join you, Mr. Derry, a block below, in a few moments, as soon as I can change my costume."

"I've certainly put my foot in it now," said Amarilly with a sigh of half regret and half relief, as a little later she hurried to meet Derry.

He took her to a cheerful, domestic, little café he had discovered, and as it was earlier than the popular luncheon hour, they had one of the small dining-rooms to themselves.

"Now, Amarilly," he said decisively, "I want to hear all about it."

Amarilly glanced out of the window and then back to him in a charming, little child-like way.

"Do you remember," she asked, with a bright-faced smile, "our other two luncheons — the first one on your birthday and that other one when you changed my whole world for me?"

"You can't dodge the issue that way, Amarilly, or lighten it with levity. I want to know from the beginning."

"It was Dumplings who began it," she said. "I was showing him how to blow bubbles, and he complained about the sub-

stance of the suds. 'Make them thick,' he said, 'with starch or something so they won't burst.' I told him bubbles were intended to burst, and he said Mr. Marsden could invent some that wouldn't burst. And sure enough after a lot of experimenting he produced a solution that evolved unburstable bubbles, and such economical bubbles, too! You can melt up the liquid and blow them over again.

"While I was racking my brains for employment, I saw an advertisement offering fifty dollars for the best and most original idea for a window display. I had just seen a girl baking pancakes and I can't tell you why she suggested bubbles. And then I thought of an idea for the prize and went still further, seeing a way to help the Marsdens out of their improvident rut. Mr. Marsden tinted white material to match the hues of soap bubbles, and I had the gown made. I knew you would adore it."

"It is worthy of Worth, or of Cinderella's godmother, but — I don't 'adore' your wearing it in a shop window. You have blown your last bubble in that window."

"I knew you wouldn't approve. That was why I didn't tell you. But it was more

fun and more lucrative than anything in the help columns. Whenever I thought of what you and Mr. St. John and others would think, I would just pretend I was a little girl blowing bubbles for play. It seemed like a sort of kindergarten with all the children in front of me. You know children are czars in a household and toys are the most saleable commodity there is. They are clamoring from all over the country for them — "

"I surmise," he interrupted abruptly, "from the proprietor's manner, that he is in the habit of being importuned to —"

"Oh, yes," she explained hurriedly. "But he always sends the silly things about their business, and I remember Miss Roxy, and don't let it annoy me."

"It is like you, Amarilly, to want to help them. I can forgive you for that, but —"

"You will be sensible about it, then, Mr. Derry, and let me stay a little longer until they are out of the woods?"

She looked up at him artlessly and was silent from surprise. He was gazing at her with startling intensity.

"I do object," he said doggedly. "It was a crazy thing that no one but you would

have thought of. It's only a matter of time when some newspaper reporter will see a story and have your picture in the papers. Has anyone besides me recognized you?"

"Corydon Blake," she admitted.

"What was he prying about for?"

"Like you, he is always in search of types. You know," she continued wistfully, laying her hand lightly on his, "I never could seem to do things as other people do. I don't know why."

In spite of himself a smile started at the corners of his mouth and crept up to his eyes, softening his expression and then there followed a crescendo of chuckles.

"That has been your charm, Amarilly, your always doing the unexpected. There will come a time — when you promise me never to step in the window again — when I can laugh at your business venture. I will pay you any price for that dream of a dress."

"I will give it to you," she said.

"And if you insist on this self-support, I will find you something — different."

"It won't be necessary," she said, "for me to do anything for support."

"Why?" he asked. "Have you really made as much profit as that?"

She told him of the prospect of immediate sale to the railroad company.

"That settles the matter," he said. "Don't go back to the window even for this afternoon."

"I can't," she said demurely. "It's Saturday — a half holiday, you know. Of course, Mr. Derry, if you dislike my blowing bubbles so much, I won't go back. Mr. Belgrave has a daughter who has window display aspirations."

"Are you going out to the farm to-night?"

"Yes; always on Saturdays."

"I'll motor you out, but I shall have to come right back, as I have an engagement in town."

When they left the café, she had a satisfactory settlement with Mr. Belgrave, and then went to Oakridge.

"There is still the commission from the sales for the Marsdens," she thought thankfully, as she walked up the path to the little cottage. "That will keep them from want."

Miss Roxy met her at the door.

"Amarilly!" she cried ruefully. "I have some terrible news to tell you. I have burned up the bubble recipe!"

CHAPTER XXI

"BUT surely," said Amarilly, when she had heard Miss Roxy's account of the catastrophe, "Mr. Marsden can mix it without the directions."

"No; he hasn't made any for several days, and you know what a poor memory he has. He has been experimenting all day and he can't get the right blend. He says he won't bother with it any more, because he is so daffy over his new invention about moving pictures. We've got a tidy little sum saved and are now out of debt."

"It was too much like a fairy story to last," said Amarilly. "Do you know, Miss Roxy, I have given up my position to-day. I am going to keep out of business for a while anyway."

It was near the close of the day when Derry came to take her home.

"Were you really so attached to the bubble window?" he asked abruptly, after they had ridden some distance in silence.

"Oh, Mr. Derry! The bubbles did burst, after all. Miss Roxy lost the formula for the solution to go in the pipe. And Mr. Marsden is so dippy over a new invention that he makes no secret of his satisfaction at the loss."

"Neither shall I," declared Derry.

"Well," she said with a sigh, "I must look for other bubbles."

"Amarilly!" he said abruptly, "you remember what I asked you on Christmas eve? I'm asking it again!"

The breeze was freighted with the intangible odor — the smell of earth — that comes in earliest spring. The ruddy after-glow of a brilliant sunset spread over the western sky and sent a faint reflection of its glory back to the east. The tall, murky towers of the city they were leaving were wrapped in the charm with which twilight drapes the most commonplace surroundings. Something in the general enchantment made his proposal seem less impossible this time.

A boy drawing a cart called out grouchily, to clamoring companions:

"Can't play to-night! Got to take the washin's home."

The inevitable descent from the sublime followed. Once more the alley days were brought vividly back to Amarilly. Her momentary thrill vanished.

"Cinderella in her ashes again!" she thought wistfully, as she said soberly:

"My answer is the same as it was then, Mr. Derry."

There was a prolonged silence. The car slipped on more speedily. Presently she stole a glance at him and saw the hurt look in his eyes. Instinctively the knowledge came to her that there was an emotion as yet unknown to her and that as long as it was unknown, her life would be colorless.

"Whatever it is," she thought, "I can't force it, and without it I couldn't make Mr. Derry happy, so I must be steadfast."

At the farm he bade her goodbye abruptly, and drove away.

"He won't ask me again," she thought as she went inside the house.

She felt as if a cold little breeze had come up and chased away the sunshine.

"I am glad," she said to the family who were gathered about the long table, "that the railroad promises quick returns,

because the bottom has dropped out of my business."

"Amarilly," demanded Flamingus, "what kind of a business was it, anyway? We never just knew."

"You never asked before. But now it's ended, I'll tell you. I blew bubbles in a window!"

"Well," commented the Boarder, when she had given them full particulars, "your bubbles lasted longer than most folks', but there's another hitch in the railroad, and we'll hev to wait a spell."

Amarilly looked dubious.

"You kin git somethin' else to do in a winder," consoled Mrs. Jenkins. "There's a hull lot of winders in town."

"My next window," decided Amarilly, "will be a play. If I could only get as absorbed in one and forget everything else, as Mr. Marsden does when he invents, I might succeed."

When she returned to her little apartment on Monday morning, she had resolved to reduce her expenses, if she could do so without loss to the Marsdens.

A pair of unmistakable newly-weds were just leaving Miss Roxy's entrance.

"If that wing is ever vacant," the young girl was saying, "please let us know."

"It will be vacant to-morrow," said Amarilly. "Yes," she said in answer to Miss Roxy's remonstrance, "I must be in the city, where I can find something to do."

The newly-weds were delighted at this information, and promptly paid the advance rent that Amarilly suggested.

The next morning she went to the city and found that her former fourth floor corner was unoccupied, so she took immediate possession.

"It's the ideal place to write," she thought. "In my room at the farm, Lily Rose would come in at the most psychological moment to ask: 'What are you writing now, Amarilly?' Ma would kill my inspirations by kindness, running up to see if I didn't want 'a bite', or to urge me to take a rest. At the cottage, Miss Roxy would bring in her sewing to 'sit with me while I wrote, so I wouldn't feel lonesome.' Here I am monarch of the little I survey. No one can come to see me because there isn't room for two. I shall be like the Miller of Dee. I am as isolated as Robinson Crusoe; and thank goodness, there is no Man Friday about. I've often wondered if

there weren't times when R. C. wished he had never seen that track in the sand!"

Sydney Marsden's Christmas box had, of course, contained a miniature stage and settings, a duplicate of the one he had made for J. Perigreen Lyle.

In her snatched hours of leisure it had done duty as a fascinating plaything, and she had conceived a friendly feeling for the little marionettes which at her bidding assumed all the attitudes of rapture and tragedy. She handled the little figures with much the same feeling with which a gambler picks up his cards, knowing that two hands are never alike, and eager to see what fate has dealt.

While touching a button that sent a burglar through a window, or a girl to her lover's embrace, or a villain to his doom, she felt all their rhapsodies, their despair and their fears. But when she came to write out the lines for these startling and unpremeditated acts, she knew them to be mawkish and inane.

"I've used my stage as Iry does his Noah's Ark," she thought. "Simply 'lined the animals up two by two.' I'll try writing the play first and then working it out."

She put her theatre out of reach and slept

with the twitching, useless sleep of mental exhaustion. When she awoke, she couldn't recall what she had written, it was so blurred in her memory with troublesome dreams. She read the manuscript through slowly, tore the sheets in two and cast them in the waste basket.

"It was as flat as J. Perigreen's," was her verdict. "Corydon Blake was right. Too many people try to write plays. Maybe I had better go into the dairy business with Gus."

That night she went out to the farm with a feeling of despondency and discouragement. The lights, the warmth, the homely supper and the heartening sound of everyone talking at once, revived her flagging spirits for a time, but when they were all in the living-room, the pendulum again swung and she was once more in the depths.

Courville's entrance with Dumplings and Pups failed to bring a change of mood. Pups looked at her earnestly, crossed the room slowly, and laid his head in her lap. The silent sympathy brought a tear which did not escape the observant eyes of Lily Rose. Quickly she came to the rescue.

"I mos' fergot, Amarilly, to thank you for the nice birthday present you sent me, and what do you suppose *he* give me?"

"I can't imagine," replied Amarilly.

"In the mornin' he took me out to the barn, and there in a stall, chewin' her cud, was a young white heifer, Cowslip's calf, Surplus, what he'd bought back from Jed! Jest think of what she done for us! Brought us the telerphone and the sale of the land, and now we hev her back!"

"'Tain't to the heifer we owe all our horseshoes," said Gus jealously, "but to her mother, Cowslip."

From Cowslip the conversation naturally turned to the "surplus."

"Cory gave me a brief account of that garment," said Courville, "the first day we met. I have always wanted a fuller narrative of its wanderings."

"You tell it, Amarilly," entreated Lily Rose.

Amarily shook off her passivity and proceeded to give a most vivacious account of the surplice which had played so large a part in the weal and woe of the family fortunes. The recital brought such lodgment in her memory of other and older days that when

she went to bed that night all desire to sleep had fled. The harking back had brought a new angle of vision, and, alone in the dark and stillness, the scenes seemed to flash brilliantly and realistically as if on a screen.

Suddenly it came. The play that she had been groping for so long and vainly. The story of the "surplus" suggested the nucleus of the idea that was to form the plot. Her imagination, quickened and exhilarated, worked dramatically. She had a thrill at last, a real, unequivocal thrill.

In the heyday of her ecstasy she arose, lighted a lamp and wrote without faltering. It was dawn when she had the synopsis and salient points on paper.

When she went to her hall bedroom, she brought forth her banished box and transformed her little figures from playmates to captains of industry. Under their quick response, her thoughts flowed like ink from a pen and a fountain pen at that, for the scenes followed faster than she could use them.

As the days went on, she became more and more of a recluse and worked as unceasingly and absorbedly as Sydney Marsden. She became reconciled to the loss of Dumplings

and the financial failure of the bubbles. She diminished the number of her visits to the farm, refused Derry's invitations so repeatedly that he ceased to make them, and quite forsook the Merediths, although this meant the forfeiture of a most delightful acquaintance she had formed with Laurence Felder, a young cousin of John Meredith's, who was making a prolonged stay at the rectory.

She had paid one visit to Corydon Blake.

"I came in response to your note," she said demurely.

"What happened?" he asked. "I went down there again, and saw a snub-nosed little girl trying to play the part, and a few days later the window was vacant."

"The bubbles burst, as all my bubbles have a way of doing."

"I am glad of it. The stage is the bubble for you — the one that will not burst."

"No; I'll only succeed in what I want to succeed in."

"You'll come to me yet."

"Yes," she agreed, smiling.

"I'm as play-mad as J. Perigreen," she told herself, "but I am not inflicting my craze on others."

The inevitable reaction came. One night at the very last of the theatre season, she felt a lassitude and depression that smothered all desire to write. There was a play she longed to see, but it was not at the theatre to which her pass admitted her. She finally yielded to the temptation to draw upon her meagre capital for the price of a seat in the balcony from where she looked down upon as much or as little as was allowed to her vision.

After the play had begun, she saw a gay crowd coming into one of the boxes. Derry, whom she had not seen in many weeks, was one of the party, and beside him was a young woman whose eyes, dark and misty, turned to his frequently and piquantly.

It gave Amarilly a queer little feeling, though she told herself that this was as it should be, and that she was glad he had found one of his own kind.

"Only I wish," she thought irrelevantly, "that she didn't have red hair, the shade of mine — almost."

In the weeks that followed, she frequently saw Derry in company with the "girl in the box." Once they passed her on horseback

in the park. With them was a young man. Some one in passing designated the little group, as "Derry Phillips, the artist, Leonore Norman and her brother Jack."

Derry did not see her, and she throttled a little twinge.

"It was what I was wishing for him," she reproached herself, "so why should I mind?"

Again she concentrated upon her play and at last she realized it had reached the point where revision should end. Then began the irksome task of copying.

"It's more satisfying and interesting, though, to copy your own poor stuff, than to click the keys for other people's brilliant productions," she decided.

At last it was ready for inspection and she ventured into the pragmatic presence of Corydon Blake, assuming an outward air of cheery bravado to cover an inward quaking of courage.

His eyes lighted as she appeared in his office.

"Something told me you would come again. What have you in that box — your make-up?"

She handed him a roll of manuscript.

"Then you didn't recover from the play-bug?" he asked regretfully. "I have read so many, many plays."

"The reading of this one may not be quite so tedious as some," she declared, "because it is illustrated. A sort of moving pictures goes with it."

She opened the box and set out her stage.

"If you will follow the lines," she proposed, "and let me be scene shifter, we'll run through with it."

"Plays, plays everywhere," he said with a sigh, "but ne'er a plot to see. If people were only as keen to go to plays as they are to write them, there would be more profit in the profession. Well, start up your Punch and Judy."

She soon perceived that he was more interested in the manipulation of the little stage than he was in the lines, to which he seemed to be paying but scant heed.

"That's all," she said, reaching finis for the first time without any accompanying thrills, but with the feeling that the production was amateurish. She wondered at her presumption in bringing it to him.

"Is it very bad?" she finally ventured to ask.

"The play? Leave it, and I'll read it in cold blood without the glamour of your little toy there. I'll telephone you when to come again."

"I suppose," she thought, as she went out into the street, "I should feel lucky to have Corydon Blake even read my play. It is considered a feather in the cap of fame to say you have had one refused by him. I have just money enough to take me home. I trust the railroad company has made reimbursement; otherwise I shall have to do copying again. How I can do anything but hold my breath, though, until I hear the verdict is beyond my comprehension."

CHAPTER XXII

AMARILLY'S announcement to her family of her having written and submitted a play met with great applause, but their optimism as to its fate didn't vanquish her feeling of failure.

She made a second announcement in the vernacular that would be the most comprehensive to them.

"Mr. Derry," she said, "has a girl!"

She met with her usual success as to dénouement, though the audience were stirred by different emotions. Lily's Rose's spirits dropped a full octave.

"I never read a book if I think it's a goin' to end bad," she thought, "and this is orfull!"

When the full gamut of surprise and curiosity had been voiced by the various members of the family, the Boarder finally observed:

"Now, Amarilly, it's our turn to tell news."

"Bad news'll keep," quickly interposed Lily Rose. "Wait till to-morrer. It's bedtime."

"No!" vetoed Amarilly. "Let's have it now. Newspapers get out an extra, you know, for any kind of news, good or bad."

"I'll tell you what it is," spoke Milton briskly. "The railroad ain't goin' through our place."

The electrifying silence was broken by the Boarder's sarcastic comment:

"We hed planned fer to break it to you gently, Amarilly. If Milt had wanted to spring it sudden, I don't know how different he could have said it."

"If 'twere done, 'twere well 'twere done quickly," replied Amarilly. "What happened?"

"They changed their route."

"Just think!" exclaimed Lily Rose, revelling in regret, "what can be done by —"

"The turn of a switch," supplied her husband.

"The childerns' eddication, Gus's ice cream parlor," summed up Lily Rose, "Flammy's housekeepin', Bud's singin' lessons, Bobby's college and wust of all, Amarilly, yer weddin' trussow all —"

"Ditched," finished the Boarder, who had returned to his "song of the road."

"Thar's a give fer every take," said Mrs. Jenkins, rallying to the emergency. "No fear now of Iry's gittin' run down by the keers, and no tellin' what night calls fer Western trips old Cowslip might have heard when the enjine whistled. Gus kin sell ice cream to Sunday-school picnics. Bobby kin work through college. Bud don't need no teacher more'n the birds do, and as fer yer weddin' clo'es, Amarilly — "

"I'll not need any," said Amarilly.

"Sure you will," declared the Boarder. "No ginger-topped gal ever got sidetracked long from the matrimonial rail."

"We was all gettin' fat and lazy on the thought of that railroad money," said Mrs. Jenkins. "Bad luck'll make us step livelier. Easy Street livin' makes the liver slow up."

"How did the railroad people come to change the route?" asked Amarilly.

"They went a mile to the east instead. We're railroaded, all right, all right," informed the Boarder.

"We ain't through with our hard luck story," said Milton. "Bud —"

"Oh, what's the use of pilin' on your sob stories!" growled Flamingus.

"I have a right to know," interposed Amarilly. "Is it Bud's voice?"

"Yes," said Bud. "Maurel says I will have only the lightest of tenor voices, and there will be nothing doing for me in concert or opera — not even a church choir."

"Well," philosophized Mrs. Jenkins, "you kin be a pianny tuner, and like as not thar'll be more money in it."

"We don't seem to be in step with luck," said Amarilly.

"But you know," said the Boarder, "all trains can't have right of way all the time. Every one on 'em's got to sidetrack once in a while."

"Don't act like you was settin' on the edge of your cheer, Amarilly," warned Mrs. Jenkins. "Fust thing you know, you'll be upset."

"Yes; set tight, Amarilly," adjured the Boarder.

The entrance of Courville with his usual accompaniment of boy and dog diverted the conversation from the family's fallen fortunes.

"Amarilly," asked Dumplings when she was taking him and Pups to the pantry, "you

don't mind 'cause I love father most of anyone, do you?"

"No, no! I am glad, Dumplings."

"Father and I belong, same as Pups and I do. It's awful nice to belong, Amarilly."

"It must be," agreed Amarilly wistfully.

"Say, Amarilly, will you come to my show to-morrow? It's a penny to come in, but I'll let *you* in free."

"That's lucky for me, Dumplings, because I haven't a penny to my name."

"Dead broke, Amarilly?" he asked anxiously and comprehendingly, recalling his own hard luck days.

"That's just what I am, dear!"

"I know what that means," he said soberly. "Father don't, though. He most likely never will know."

"It will always help you, Dumplings, dear, and help others, too, — that you do know."

When Courville and Dumplings had gone home and Amarilly had started to go upstairs, her mother said consolingly: "Amarilly, thar wouldn't be no ups if there wa'nt no downs. Pick up your pieces."

"There are no pieces," thought Amarilly disconsolately, when she was alone in her room. "Things seem to be smashed to powder. But there is nothing I can do about it. I can't make the railroad directors change their route, I can't restore Bud's voice, nor can I hypnotize Corydon Blake into accepting my play. But all these things seem too big propositions to handle, and the little bubble on the top wave of my sea of troubles is the most appalling — the inability to pay my fare back to town."

Her door creaked, and Cory looked in.

"It's awful late, Amarilly," she said plaintively, "but may I come in?"

"Come in, Cory, and tell me," she said responsively.

"Oh, Amarilly, I was going to take my share of the railroad and go away to school the way you done — did, I mean. And now, I can't!"

Her voice trailed off into a sob.

"Here I've been inventorying my own little woes," thought Amarilly remorsefully, "and never once thinking about the others. Poor little Co! I'll transfer some of my self-sympathy to her."

"Come and sit down here, Co, and we'll talk about it. The railroad shall not make any difference in your plans. Just be patient and go to the Haleboro High School another year and then I promise that you shall go away to the best school we can select. If I don't make enough money to send you, there are five strapping brothers who shall chip in and help. When there are so many of us, it would be a pity if we couldn't manage to educate one little sister."

"Amarilly!" cried Cory ecstatically, "I never can do anything for you, but I can love you a lot."

"And that is the best thing anyone can do, Co."

"You've made me awful happy."

"Do you suppose you could make me happy, too, Amarilly?"

Amarilly turned quickly at the sound of the small, dejected voice. There were lines of mute misery in Bud's dark eyes.

"Oh, Bud!"

Her voice broke a little. His case called for something money could not bring.

"You may have lost your voice, Bud, but the music is still in you, and it's sure to come

out in some way, if not in the one you found for a little while. There is something very much like the human voice that —"

"The violin!" guessed Bud.

"Maybe you could learn to play it. We will see, Bud. And if you can't, why, music isn't altogether a matter of sound you know. There's music in everything. Maybe you will grope for a while, but you'll find the way some time. Now you and Co go to sleep."

"There!" she thought, when they had gone away, comforted, "I've given two promissory notes I must make payment on, so work instead of wails for me."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE next morning Iry came up from the river with the disturbing news that some men were camping in the woods on the bank.

"And we put up a big sign down there, 'No trespassers!'" exclaimed the Boarder.

"What is the objection?" asked Amarilly.

"They're ginerally a lawless lot, stealing chickens or eggs or anything they can lay their hands on."

After breakfast Amarilly went out to hunt for eggs. The hens had been let loose from their wired confines "to pick a spring living", Bobby said, and they had acquired a habit of promiscuous and desultory depositing of eggs in any place convenient, so that the family were apt to stumble on an egg-shelled path at any step.

Her ears were assailed by the shrieking of a distracted looking hen in the vicinity of some wild grapevines down in the lane that led to the river.

"You must be the publicity agent of the roost," apostrophized Amarilly. "I think I have found the trail to your nest."

She parted the vines and in the deep grass she came upon a nest without eggs. Something shining caught her eye and she pounced upon a half dollar and a scrap of paper on which was written:

"To the owner of these Easter joys: If you knew how sick we are of the sight, smell and taste of fish, I'm sure you wouldn't mind doing the buying and selling.

"Yours gratefully,
"A. CAMPER."

"I don't know how much the eggs are worth, but I think this fifty cents is right," said Amarilly, when she had related the incident at home.

"Well, I guess," snickered Bobby, "they won't think the eggs are worth anything when they break 'em. Those eggs were most ready to be hatched. I knew the nest was there."

"In that case," said Amarilly, "they owe us for spring chickens."

The sound of an automobile in the roadway brought the family to the door. Derry

had motored over in company with a young man whom he introduced as Jack Norman.

"*Her* brother," thought Amarilly.

"There seems to be a cloud hanging over Snydikit, Amarilly," said Derry presently. "Your mother alone appears normal, and Lily Rose gives me very disturbing looks of silent disapproval. What is it all?"

"Nothing," replied Amarilly, "except a few things such as the railroad snubbing us and passing a mile to the east."

"Really?"

It didn't help Amarilly's frame of mind that he took the news so passively.

"It's the first time," she thought, walking abruptly away from him, "that he doesn't seem—*sympatica*. I think our Italian teacher was right when she said we had no substitute for that word. It must be because he is in love, and indifferent to everything but *her*."

She came up to the veranda where Jack Norman was eating jelly-cake and drinking milk.

He looked at her most appreciatively.

"Say," he said in a burst of emotion, "don't you want to take a whirl down the lane or somewhere?"

"Yes!" accepted Amarilly, who felt that the thing most to be desired just then would be to ride fast and far. "Not down the lane, though, because ours has a turning — into bogs; but there is a highway."

"Then let's hit that highway," he suggested promptly, putting down his glass.

Derry stared in bewilderment after the swiftly vanishing car, his attention finally diverted from the cloud of dust by a still, small voice.

"Halloa, Mr. Derry! I came across lots."

"Why, halloa, Dumps!" replied Derry, lifting the small person to his shoulder.

"Let's walk a piece, Mr. Derry. I want to tell you a secret."

"Sure, we will, Dumps, what 'tis?" he asked, striding quickly away.

"You won't tell, hope to die, cross your heart?"

"Double cross it, Dumps."

"Well, Amarilly's dead broke!"

"Really?" asked Derry, a twinkle in his eye.

"Yes; and besides the railroad going the wrong way, Bud's voice didn't come back. It's just going to be a little one for a cent."

At this information Derry's concern was quite apparent. He knew what Bud's voice was to Amarilly.

"You don't know what it is to be dead broke," resumed Dumplings. "Neither does father. I do, though."

"Wise Dumplings! How do you happen to know that Amarilly's dead broke?"

"She told me, and I told father, and he said it was too bad; but that there was nothing we could do, because she is so proud and independent."

"Don't worry, Dumps," said Derry carelessly. "Amarilly's been 'dead broke' a great many times, and found a way out of the fix. Let's go up to the house. I am hungry, or thirsty, for some of that milk. Hope the greedy Norman left some."

When Amarilly returned from her ride, she was seemingly in better spirits.

"I understand," said Derry, coming up to her, as she was talking to Dumplings, "that you are dead broke."

"That was last night," she replied, with a little smile. "Half a dollar has fallen miraculously into my hands this morning."

"Half a dollar! Gee! Some dough," ex-

claimed Dumplings. "Where did you get it, Amarilly?"

"In a magic nest. Wait until I read you this little note, and see if you believe in fairies."

"Are you going back to town to-day?" asked Derry, when Dumplings' laughter over the condition of the eggs which Amarilly described had subsided.

"No; I am going to stay two or three days and get half a dollar's worth of fun from A. Camper. It isn't enough to do anything else with."

Young Norman joined them then and was reluctantly taken away by Derry, who said they had a long drive ahead of them.

The next morning Amarilly reconnoitred along the river bank, and when she had satisfied herself that the campers were not at home, she went to the rear of the tent and absconded a pan of delicately tinted little brook trout. She next wrapped the silver half dollar in a piece of paper and weighed it down with a stone. On the paper she had written:

"There is no selling — or giving — at this place — to trespassers. Since you are so

tired of eating fish (we are not), it will be an act of charity to take the trout from you. If you let the eggs set one day longer, you'll have pullets and will owe us the market price."

That evening when Amarilly went with Gus and Bobby to witness a milking contest, she found Cowslip wearing a wreath of field flowers. Fastened to this wreath was a tobacco bag containing a ten dollar bill and a note.

"The cows were in the pasture, and I could not resist attempting the rôle of the Merry Milkmaid. This patient, gentle animal seemed overstocked with milk and was quite grateful to me for my inexperienced but effectual efforts to relieve her of her load. As we seem to have deprived you of one dozen spring chickens, I am hereby paying for same.

"Again yours,
"A. CAMPER."

"As soon as you have finished milking, Gus," directed Amarilly, "take this money back to A. Camper and tell him he can pay for the amount of milk he purloined. He shouldn't have taken me seriously about the chickens."

It was late before Gus found time to go to

the river and he returned with the information that the campers had decamped, and there was no clue to their identity.

"What will we do with the money?" he asked in consternation. "It isn't coming to us."

"I shall borrow it," decided Amarilly, "until we find out who my friend in need is. Then I'll pay back."

"Bless A. Camper!" she thought, as she took the train into town the next day. "He's given me a tide-over and an idea. If the play is discarded, I'll rent the camping concessions on our river bank and sell eggs and other commodities to A. Campers and others. If I could endure a permanent country residence, I'd take up farming and make every inch of soil produce. I'd even convert Lily Rose's beloved flowers into Dutch bouquets and sell them in the city. Ma's cottage cheese and spice cakes would go to tea rooms. When I think how much there is waiting to be sold, and how many people there are longing to buy — anything — I wonder why there are not more middlemen to bring them together. Somewhere there is a buyer for everything — even for a poor play, maybe."

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Amarilly reached her room she found notice of a telephone call from Blake.

"I'll brace up my courage to meet any fate," she thought, as she was admitted to his inner office.

"Glad you called," he said. "I want your nifty little play."

Her heart spun around a few times and then slackened so suddenly she feared it had stopped.

"Of course," he continued, "there will have to be many changes, you know."

"I know," she conceded, "Laurence Felder told me what is done to plays. They're made into Aladdin houses and sawed out and sectioned and put up and taken down."

"There's plenty of good timber in this to do almost anything with."

The surprise and relief in having the play accepted went like wine to Amarilly's head,

but she quickly rallied and was jog-trotting along again like a sturdy, little Shetland pony in the commercial path of the business details in connection with the matter.

When she was leaving, she felt that she must give some expression of what it all meant to her.

"I hope that some time you will feel as happy as I do at this moment," she said, a smile of rainbow brilliance on her lips.

"You have a right to be happy," he replied. "You are an artist at settings and situations. That tenement interior in the first act is wonderful — poverty without squalor — the cottage was cleverly correct and the country house elegantly simple — all in harmony. Where did you get the atmosphere, and for the studio, too?"

"I was bred in a tenement and I was everywhere behind the scenes at Barlow's. Once I took care of a studio for an artist and in one of my college vacations I acted as tutor at the 'simple country home of one of my classmates.'"

"No wonder you are so versatile; but we must begin at once to collaborate and revise. Come down at this hour to-morrow."

"Which means," interpreted Amarilly, as she left the office, "that he'll re-write the play, and I must subscribe to all he says. I shall try to pull a willing second oar. Mr. St. John says it is a gift to be able and ready to follow. I think I can soon make good on my promises to Bud and Co. It seems as if I ought to do something unusual to celebrate. Half the pleasure in a piece of good luck is telling it to a confidant. I haven't time to go home. Mr. Derry seems no longer interested or available. Mr. Courville is absorbed in Dumplings, bless his heart! I might advertise for one A. Camper."

As she momentarily paused in front of an alluring shop window, she heard a voice in transit say, "Mrs. Meredith has come home."

Quickly she caught a car and was in a short time admitted to Colette's sitting-room.

"Amarilly, you look the personification of the beatitudes! What has happened?"

"Oh, Mrs. St. John, I have written a play, and Mr. Corydon Blake has taken it! I came right from his office to tell you."

"Amarilly, you always did shoot out astounding news like a Zeppelin. It carries me back to the 'surplus days' when you came

to me in a wake of a whirlwind with some sensational announcement. It was the thing of things for you to do, you little product of Barlow's, and so of course you did it, and is it what you had up your sleeve those typewriting days? What does Mr. Derry think? I'll call him up, and we'll have a little celebration."

"No!" protested Amarilly quickly. "I just heard that you were home, so I ran in for a moment to tell you."

"Do you mean to tell me that Derry Phillips doesn't know?"

"I told no one. I was afraid I should fail, and I only just learned that it was accepted."

"Then I shall share the excitement of hearing you tell him."

"No," pleaded Amarilly. "I must really go and send a line home. Anyway, Mr. Derry couldn't come. He'd be engaged."

"Haven't you been seeing him lately?" asked Colette, as she looked keenly into Amarilly's candid eyes.

"No; I've been working all the time on the play, and then he — well, he has a sweetheart — and she has — red hair!"

"Amarilly, are you sure!"

"Yes; I've seen them together at the theatre, in the park, motoring, on horseback and — but I want to tell you about my play."

Collette's interest in the play, however, was not quite so keen at present as her anxiety over Derry's digression, and she telephoned the young artist as soon as Amarilly had left the house. She told him she had just returned and had some wonderful news to impart. He quickly responded in person, but heard her news without apparent enthusiasm.

"Maybe," he said, with a little laugh, "that is why Amarilly has turned me down so hard the last few months."

"But she claims you have been otherwise engaged — with some one with red hair!"

"Yes, I have. Leonore Norman."

After this explanation he deftly changed the conversation.

The summer was like a long drawn interlude to Amarilly. She bridged over the period that must elapse before the production of her play by tutoring Cory and solacing Bud.

Colette was with her parents at their summer home and Derry had gone west with the Norman family.

In the latter part of August Amarilly received a letter from Brenda. Looking up at the end of her second perusal, she caught the wistfulness in the eyes of Lily Rose.

"Would you like to read it, Lily Rose?" she asked. "One part will interest you, I feel sure."

Lily Rose reached eagerly for the extended letter and was soon absorbed in its contents.

"It's gittin' turribly excitin'," she confided to her husband later that night. "Just like them weekly continued movies. That there Brenda's ranch is next to one them Normans and Mr. Derry is a-stoppin' at. It's run by a feller named Billy Somers, and he—he is engaged to the redheaded gal Mr. Derry's been rushin', and Mr. Derry has been paintin' her likeness all this time for her to give to her feller."

"Wasn't a-paintin' of her likeness when they was to shows and a ridin' in the park, was he?" asked her husband skeptically.

"Sure thing. They hev to do that way. Mr. Derry explained to me onct. He said to git a good likeness of anyone, you must see how they look at all times and git all their looks into one look. I suppose he was lone-

some. Amarilly was writin' and mebby he was tryin' to make her jealous; or mebby he liked to look at her red hair and pertend it was Amarilly's."

"She has only paved the way for some one else," Amarilly was thinking. "But somehow, I am glad she is not *the* one. I think I'd rather it would be some one whose hair wasn't red."

CHAPTER XXV

ON the night of the first production of Amarilly's play, the Jenkins family, including Almy, occupied a row of seats in the balcony. There had been many diversions en route to their goal. Twice had Iry been jerked from underneath passing motors, which episodes to him were as nothing compared with the awful calamity of his having swallowed a nickel. Ceely lost her hat, and there had been various minor mishaps, but at last they had arrived, as Bobby said, "right side up."

Amarilly had scarcely taken her seat when she heard a voice behind her saying:

"There is a comfortable, chummy feeling in being up here, after all."

She turned quickly.

"Oh, Mr. Derry!"

At sight of her strained, anxious expression, his levity vanished.

"Come back here, Amarilly, and sit with me. I have an extra seat for you."

"Go on, Amarilly," urged Lily Rose, feeling that this was all that was needed to make her evening perfect.

"Sure, go set with him," said Mrs. Jenkins placidly.

An impatient shove from Flamingus, and his "Oh, g'wan, Amarilly," decided her.

"I know how you feel," said Derry, as she occupied the seat next him. "I remember when my first picture was hung, I lingered in the outskirts, fearful that I would not recognize it in so unusual and unexpected a place."

"It must be like tryin' a new receipt," Mrs. Jenkins was remarking to Flammy's girl. "It sounds tasty, but you hev your misgivin's after you've shet the ovin door. You know you've mixed and measured the way it said, and yet you're skeert till it's done."

"Of course," said Derry reproachfully, "you knew the St. Johns wouldn't come up here, but you might have known how I would want to be with you anywhere. I felt sure that this was where I would find you, so I lay in wait. Why didn't you ask me?"

"I thought that you would be with your friends."

"You know whom I consider my nearest friends. There come the Merediths now. I should have thought you would have liked to sit where you could watch J. Perigreen matching his last syllable in envy."

Amarilly scarcely heard him. As warily as a cat watches for the first glimpse of a mouse whisker, she was awaiting the rise of the curtain.

Throughout the evening she sat statuesque, endeavoring to judge the play on its merits alone, as critically and impartially as Blake himself would do.

Every now and then Derry turned from the scenes on the stage to watch the absorbed young face beside him. He recognized the kindred spirit of the artist seeking the confirmation of her conception, longing to know if her lines rang true. He felt that he alone in that whole house knew what she was undergoing, and the knowledge seemed to bring them nearer. In fancy he followed her from the altitudes of rapture down to the depths of apprehension and misinterpretation. He was conscious of a swift arousing from his former diplomatic dallying and whimsical deference to Amarilly's opposition. He was

no longer content to wait for a propitious, psychological moment. Suddenly the loft of the theatre was freighted with the sweetness of a cooling breeze on a tropical night.

The dreaded part, the big scene, was over. With a little sigh of relief, Amarilly relaxed her tension. A cool, sustaining hand slipped into hers. Then she remembered Derry, and she was conscious of a feeling of propinquity, a glad knowledge of a subconscious intimacy that filled her with content at his presence beside her. From scene to scene she now grew more exhilarated. Not because the audience were giving such spontaneous and prolonged applause, but because she felt that the play rang true.

When the last applause had died away and the family rose to go, Lily Rose invited Derry to go home with them.

"Almy's ma is gettin' supper for us," she informed him.

He didn't separate the little party by mentioning his car, but rode out with them in the interurban.

"I am glad for you, Amarilly," was all he had said, when they were leaving the theatre.

"I could never have done it but for you,

Mr. Derry, and the wish to show you that I could make good."

"Except that it pleased you, Amarilly, I didn't care whether you 'made good' or not. I'd like you just as well if you had remained the little Amarilly of 'surplus' days. All I gave you was the chance to get an education because I saw how much you wanted one."

Amarilly looked at him with a rueful expression in her eyes.

"All the time you were writing your play, I knew you were deep in some project, so I submitted temporarily to being utterly ignored. But now that it is all out of your system, I feel that I have reached my limit of waiting, and you are not going to shut me out any longer. I shall at least sit by and hand you pencils. And, by the way, Amarilly, you are sure you are still heart whole?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Derry."

"You have had so many — approaches."

"Why, what do you mean, Mr. Derry?"

"I know all about the presumption of Courville's offering you the post of stepmother to Dumps."

"How —"

"Never mind. I surmised it would happen

that day we were down in the woods and he stepped so high. But whereabouts are the Courville family? I didn't see them."

"Pups is very ill. Of course Dumplings wouldn't desert him, and Mr. Courville wouldn't leave them at such a time."

"Poor Pups! But if he passes on, there will be the consolation of knowing that his life of prayer must lead him to Paradise; to resume: there is Laurence Felder—"

"Oh, Mr. Derry!" she cried in real distress.

"Murder will out. He confided in his warm adviser, John Meredith, who in turn told his wife—"

"He should have known better."

"Who? John Meredith, or Laurence?"

"Mr. Felder. But that was over quickly!"

"Which sounds like Iry when your mother gives him a dose of medicine. He says 'Thath over!' and then clamors for pie. I myself shooed Jack Norman off the track last spring."

"At least, I have one romance of which you know nothing."

"Tell me," he demanded quickly.

"A. Camper. Let me tell you the sequel to the nest egg."

She told him the particulars of the chicken deal and the opportuneness of the ten-dollar loan.

"I liked his notes," she concluded, "and he has the charm of the unknown. I *must* find out who he is."

"Why must?"

"I am under obligations to him, which I must pay, of course. I wish I could do something for him."

"You can. Behold in me, A. Camper."

"No!" exclaimed Amarilly incredulously.

He produced a bill book and from between its leaves took two folded bits of paper.

Amarilly surveyed her note in dismay.

"I don't see—"

"Jack Norman had the fishing fever last spring and lugged me along with him. You know I am not long on localities. He lost his bearings and we motored all over the county before he found a place to his liking. I hadn't the slightest idea where we were when we pitched camp. He went off one day in search of a trout pool and left me to prepare the next meal. You remember my limitations in that direction. I went foraging around until I found a hen's nest which was

loaded — and you know the rest. The next day Norman suggested a ride and by circuitous route we drew up, to my surprise, in your front yard. Dear little Dumps told me you were dead broke, and when you mentioned the nest, I knew whom I had robbed, and saw an opportunity to finance you. Now that you are a playwright, I can tell you. I didn't dare leave more than I did, for fear you'd employ a detective; and I knew of old how far you can make a ten-spot go. As you have expressed a desire to do something for A. Camper, I'll ask you to —"

There was the click of her purse and a ten dollar bill was extended.

"Amarilly, you little imp, you know that wasn't what I meant! If you care for me, or A. Camper, or both of us, will you grant me the one thing I ever asked of you — the one thing I've always asked of you?"

"Wait, Mr. Derry. I've thought it over many a time and I know that it's best for you and your happiness for me to say no. I'm sorry —"

Milton rushed up and interrupted.

"Amarilly, I've been figuring up your

share of the profits for the season. It will be whopping."

"Milton," said Amarilly whimsically, "you must learn that figures *do* lie when you are counting your own profits."

It was a gay party that sat down to the big, sumptuously-spread table at which Mrs. Jenkins proudly presided.

"I held my breath for six minutes in that one place," confessed the Boarder, when they were chatting of the play.

"Yes; and when he let go," said Bobby, "he pretty near swore. He said—"

"Switch off there, Bobby!" admonished the Boarder.

"There was one time," said Lily Rose, "when I was skeert for fear 'twouldn't come out all right."

Amarilly was silent; too happy for words. A hundred little sparks of golden light flashed in her eyes, and Derry gazed upon her with the combined admiration of lover and artist.

The limitations in speech and station of those about her affected him not a jot. He knew what they all were in heart, and what they were to her.

Though they spoke in a language different from his, he saw in the Boarder's grey eyes the reflection from a big heart and in the voices of Mrs. Jenkins and Lily Rose he heard the ring of sincerity.

Suddenly Lily Rose voiced something of what he was thinking.

"Amarilly, I read something to-day that would be orful purty in a play."

"What was it, Lily Rose?" asked Amarilly.

"Hearts of Gold are better nor Tongues of Silver."

"Thank you, Lily Rose," said Derry softly.

She looked at him perplexedly.

"You've got both, Mr. Derry," she declared emphatically.

"Thank you again, Lily Rose."

When they arose from the table, Flamingus escorted Almy and his prospective mother-in-law to their home. The Boarder and the older boys went out to the barn, "to look after things", and Lily Rose began to shoo the younger of the household stairward.

"Clearing the track for the Lovers' Limited Special?" facetiously asked her husband, as he lighted the lantern.

Amarilly's thoughts, however, were far away

from love and Derry. The dim theatre, the luminous stage, the subdued music, the play — so familiar and yet so strange — the applauding audience all made one beautiful complete whole in her rosary of remembrance, and she longed to be alone. She thwarted all Lily Rose's efforts and followed the flock upward. To her dismay, Lily Rose found herself stranded with the would-be wooer.

"Lily Rose," he asked, "can't you tell me why?"

"I think I can, Mr. Derry," she replied earnestly. "I've thought it all out, same as Amarilly does her plays. In the first place she's as proud as Potiphar."

She paused in secret admiration of this simile. She had recently read it in a book and had had no idea how fine it would sound.

"And most likely," she resumed, "she thinks she's beneath you. But you see, Amarilly is one of them kind of women what's got to mother someone. When she had her folks to look after back in the alley, she was in her elements. When she was takin' keer of your studio and cookin' for you, she had you under her wing, and I bet at school she looked out for some of them girls and their

things like a reg'lar old mother hen. When she come home here she was like a fish out of water till Dumplings and Pups come along. After she lost them, she mothered her play. If you could only make her think you needed her awful bad — if you was to get sick or poor —"

"Lily Rose, I can't get sick. I am too disgracefully healthy. And I have such a contempt for money, I can't lose it. The more extravagant I am, the faster my dividends seem to multiply."

"You might give it all to the poor," suggested Lily Rose, recalling the serial story she was reading, "and then if you were poor in a garret, she'd come to you."

"That sounds alluring," said Derry, "but not feasible. You see pride seems to be married to poverty, and I'd probably get too proud to let her share my garret home. And, somehow, Lily Rose, your plan doesn't sound practical. I am sure our sensible Amarilly would tell me I was a fool to give all my worldly goods to the poor; that I should at least have kept out enough for two rooms and a bath."

"Well, I can't think of anything else just

now," said Lily Rose with a sigh, "but a way will come. It always does."

"In books and air-castles," he remarked, as he went up to his room, where he pondered long over ways and means of unlocking the door to Amarilly's heart. She seemed to him a perfect companion, in harmonious accord with all his moods; self-reliant and resourceful, yet with delightful little streaks of femininity. For all her courage of the strong, he felt in a subtle, undefined way that she would be dependent upon him should her hour of need come to her.

"Like Lily Rose," he said, "I can think of no way now, but one *shall* come."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE next morning Derry stood in the roadway in front of the house when Courville and Dumplings came along. The latter was garbed in an up-to-the-minute hunting outfit and proudly brandished a small rifle.

"Pups is most well, Mr. Derry," he cried.

"I am so glad," exclaimed Derry.

"We've got a lot to be glad about to-day," said Dumplings. "Father got the morning papers, all about Amarilly's play, and we are going to see it to-night. If Pups hadn't been so sick, we would have gone last night."

"Where is Amarilly?" asked Courville. "We came this way to congratulate her."

"She isn't up yet."

"I am taking the boy out for his first hunt. Don't you want to come down to the woods with us?"

"Yes, please come, and see me shoot!" entreated Dumplings.

"Sure I'll come," said Derry. "I'll see what I can find in the way of a weapon."

The Boarder furnished an ancient type of rifle and the three went on to the woods. By the river they met Iry who looked so longingly at Dumplings' rifle that Derry invited him to join the party.

"You can be game carrier, Iry, and maybe Dumps will let you try his rifle once."

"Of course he will," said Courville.

"Of course I will," echoed Dumplings.

In the delight of the youngsters, the two men harked back to their own first hunt with a real rifle.

Three hours later Lily Rose, who was returning from the woods where she had been to take hot potatoes and coffee to the wood-choppers, came upon Iry.

"Oh, Lily Roth," he cried excitedly, "Dumplingth hath shot Mithter Derry, and they've took him to Dumplingth' houth."

Lily Rose questioned him all the way up to the farmhouse and succeeded in getting full particulars.

"Amarilly," she said tragically, "I've got some bad news to tell you; but you know what they say; 'from the hour of our birth

to the hour we're in the hearse, there's nothing so bad but it might be worse.'"

"Lily Rose," implored Amarilly, "bad news is not improved by keeping. What is it?"

"Dumpth thot Mithter Derry," burst in Iry quickly, resenting Lily Rose's interception of his news.

"He ain't goin' to die," said Lily Rose quickly, and contritely, as she saw the color recede from Amarilly's cheeks.

"No, Amarilly," informed Iry, again thrusting the narrator aside. "He ith up and kin walk. He told *me* to come over and tell you tho you'd hear it right."

"Then tell me, Iry," she begged.

"You thee we wath all gittin' over a fence, and Dumpth didn't carry hith gun like hith pa told him to, and it went off and thot Mithter Derry, but it didn't knock him over, and Dumpth' pa give him thome kind of aid."

"Lemonade," prompted Co.

"Lemonade yer granmother!" scoffed Iry. "He bound him up. When we come out on the road, a doctor come along in hith auto and took uth all to Dumplingth' houth and bound up Mithter Derry thome more, and

then Mithter Derry told me to ride with the doctor ath far ath I could."

"What I can't understand," said Mrs. Jenkins, "is how it wasn't you as got shot, Iry. Your luck may be changin'. Lily Rose, what did you want to skeer us that way about Mr. Derry for and make us think he was shot serious?"

"You ain't hearn the worst yet," said Lily Rose loftily. "Go on with the rest, Iry."

"I come out of the houth ahead of doc, and then Dumplingth run out and went down by the barn and begun to holler hith head off. I follered and athked him what wath the matter, and he thed the houthkeeper hed told him ath how Mithter Derry's hand hed got to be cut off, and Dumplingth knew he done it, tho he felt bad."

"And," interpolated the first narrator in tragic climax, "it's his right hand, the one he paints with!"

"Well," said the Boarder placidly, "can't he learn to be a southpaw?"

Amarilly was very pale now.

"I will go right over to the Corners," she said.

As she walked across lots to the river road, she was arranging Derry's future:

"It will be a living death to him not to be able to paint," she thought. "He must learn to use his left hand as the Boarder said, and that will take such patience and time! Poor Mr. Derry! I must keep right at him every minute and not let him give up practising."

As she came around a bend in the road, she gave a little cry. Derry was coming toward her, his right arm hanging unnaturally straight, the hand bandaged.

Then something started in Amarilly's heart. It grew and grew until by the time she had come up to him, it seemed as if it were too big and too beautiful to hold.

"Oh, Mr. Derry!" she cried, running up to him. "I can't tell you how sorry I am — I —"

Her voice trailed off into a little sob, and she clung tight to his left hand which in her distress she had grasped.

He looked at her keenly, detecting a new note in her voice.

"Did Iry tell you?"

"Yes; and I was coming to you. Is it

safe for you to be about like this? Did you lose much blood? When —"

"Courville was right there with the first aid. The doctor will come over to-morrow and —"

"Sit down here, Mr. Derry," she said, going toward a fallen tree. "I want to talk to you."

He sat down beside her.

"You are very brave in the face of such a calamity, Mr. Derry; but if you only will, you can learn to use your left hand as deftly as your right, if you will be patient and persistent. You must, Mr. Derry. You won't let the loss of your hand keep you from your work?"

He was silent for a moment.

"But, Amarilly, you know I am not long on patience, not that kind. To succeed and keep up the pace, I must have a constant spur. Will you promise to help me in my need and keep me eternally at it, as you used to do in our studio days when I would get lazy and try to procrastinate?"

"Indeed, I will, Mr. Derry," she promised eagerly. "I'll come to your studio every day and make you work."

"But that isn't enough!" he said, his eyes darkening. "It isn't enough to have your encouragement in my working hours. I must have it in my other hours — hours of enforced idleness, when the devils of discouragement and despair will be sure to attack and weaken me. Amarilly, you wouldn't marry me for love of me, but won't you now — when I need you so much — when without you I cannot work — or live?"

The something in Amarilly's heart which had taken such deep and hardy root overcame her opposition.

"Yes, Mr. Derry," she said quietly, "I will."

His uninjured arm came quickly and closely about her. A wave of color rolled upward from her slender throat. Beneath her lashes lurked a look, tender and exquisite.

"Amarilly," he said softly, "promise again. Will you be my wife?"

As a bridge yields to the vibration of a certain note, so the one little point of resistance in Amarilly was broken by his appeal.

"Yes," she said, with an intonation a man hears but once in his life, "yes, Mr. Derry, I will."

Lily Rose had no appetite that night for supper. She was too absorbed in the blissful pleasure of watching Amarilly as she cut the meat on Derry's plate, and performed similar offices for him.

"It's better than movies nor novels," she thought, as she whipped the work through, scuffled the children to bed and maneuvered their elders into remote backgrounds.

"Amarilly," said Derry, when they were alone in the long, low-ceilinged, dimly-lighted living-room, "I have a confession to make."

"Something about your past?" she asked with a light laugh.

"Yes; a very recent past."

"About the red-headed girl whose picture you painted?"

"Much more recent than that. Amarilly, a promise has a serious and solemn meaning to you, hasn't it?"

"Why, of course, Mr. Derry."

"Aren't you ever going to omit the 'Mr'?"

"I don't believe so, Mr. Derry. It would be just as difficult as it would be to stop saying 'Ma.'"

"I think I like the sound of it, anyway. But I won't make this confession, Amarilly,

unless you promise perfect absolution. Will you?"

"I surely will, Mr. Derry," she promised.

"As I was about to say, Amarilly, having promised to marry me, you will not retract under any circumstances?"

"Yes; under some circumstances."

"What, for instance?"

"If you should tell me you had changed your mind and didn't care for me."

"That would be impossible. My love for you is more rock-like than the laws of the Medes and Persians. So, now for my confession. The wound in my hand is only a flesh wound which a little time and attention will entirely heal."

With quick intuition Amarilly grasped the situation.

"Oh, Mr. Derry! Such a flimsy trick! And I played right into your hands."

"Yes; and into my arms, too."

"But, Mr. Derry, that doesn't seem like you —"

"Wait, Amarilly. *I* didn't deceive you. Courville's housekeeper is a pessimist, and she worked a grudge off on Dumps by voicing her forebodings, I presume. When I first

met you in the woods this bright and beautiful morning I didn't know what you had heard, and when I divined what you imagined, I couldn't help letting you think the worst until I had your promise."

"It doesn't seem like you, Mr. Derry —"

"I know, dear; but you see Lily Rose made me able to catch the cue quickly. She said you might take me if I needed you, and I do need you. My right hand needs you as much as my left one does. My hand and heart will both be paralyzed if you go back on me now. Won't you forgive me?"

"I forgive you because — well — I think I must always have had in my heart the feeling of a pauperess for her prince toward you."

"Then why were you so persistent in your refusal?"

"I was afraid at first. I thought I ought not to; and then — Oh, Mr. Derry, were you ever so happy in the thought of something coming that you just had to put it off? But I didn't really know until Iry told me you must lose your hand."

"Well," said Derry, "thank the Lord for Dumplings' gun! Dumplings will be glad to learn that his prayer has been granted."

"I told you, Mr. Derry," reminded Lily Rose, the next day, "that a way would come. Do you know, though I bet she wouldn't own up to it, I think Amarilly way down in her heart is sorry your hand ain't injured for keeps."

"Why, Lily Rose!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes; she would so have loved to fuss over you and teach you how to use your left hand. It's the motherin' instinct that leads women to love, and if they don't feel like motherin' the man they've wed, God help him!"

"Lily Rose," asked Derry gravely, "did you read that in a book?"

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